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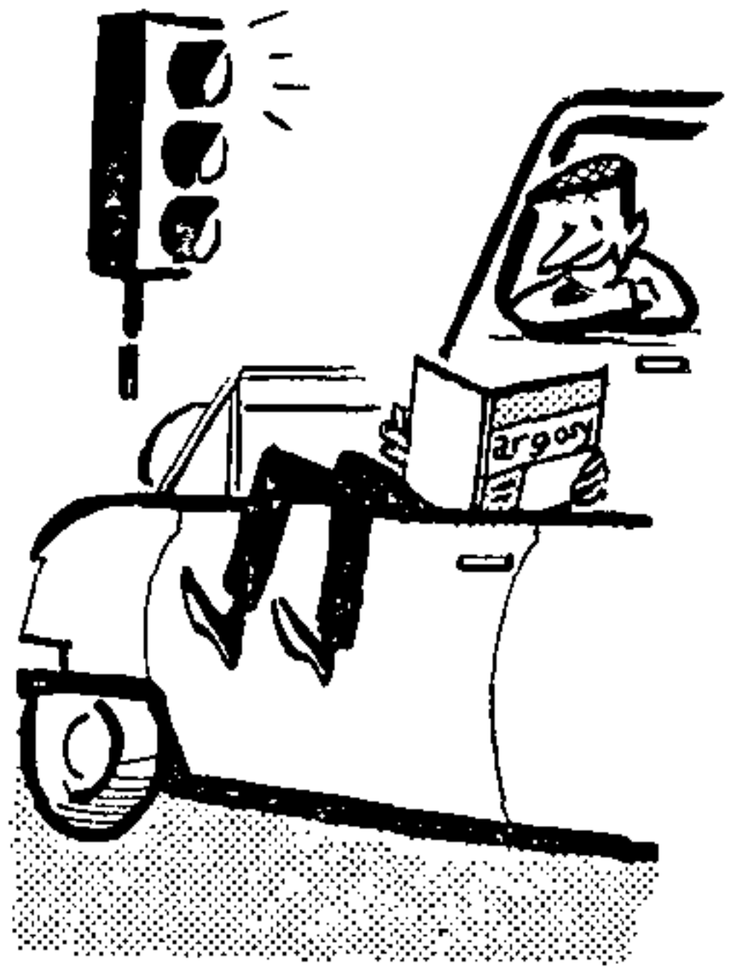

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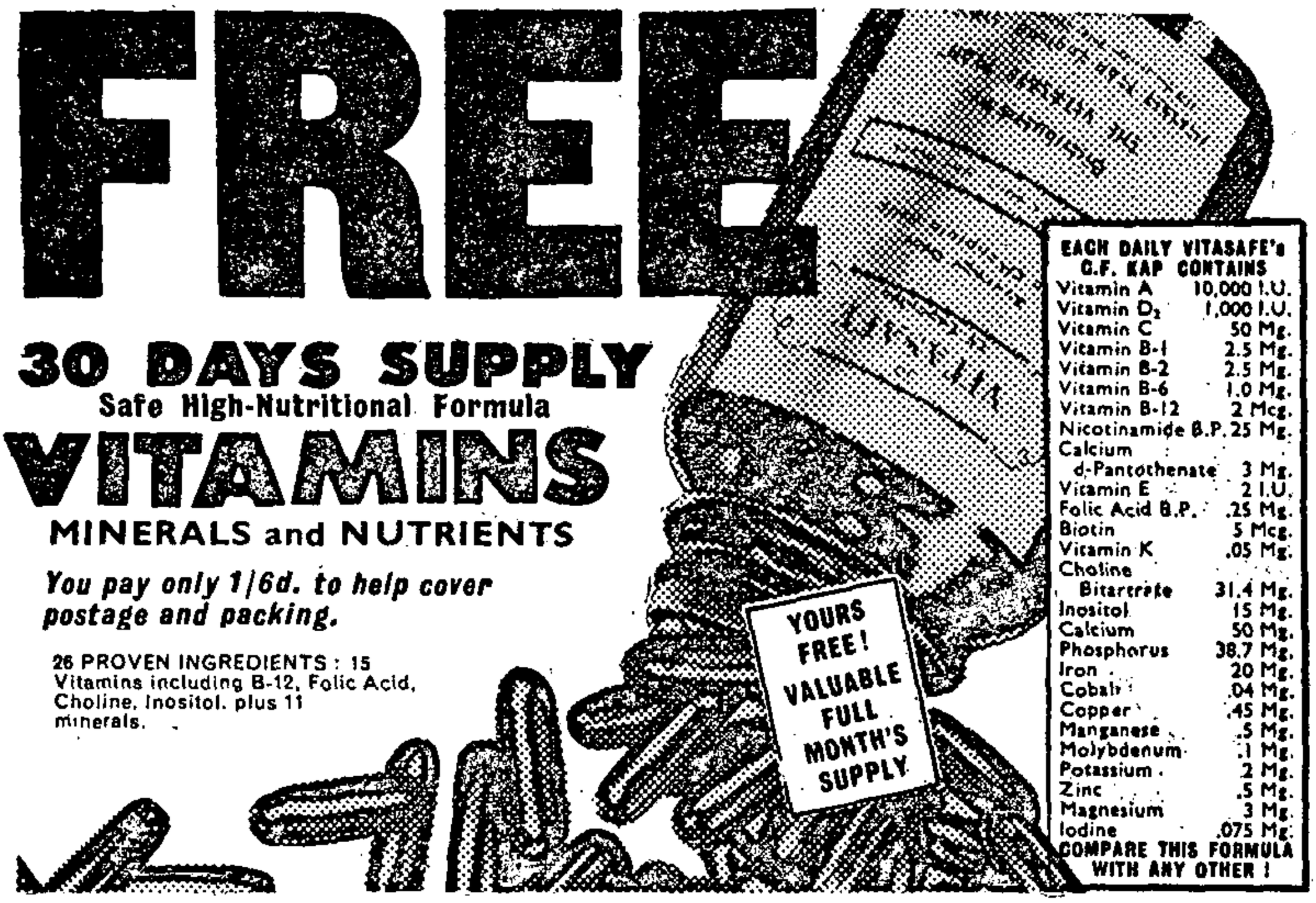

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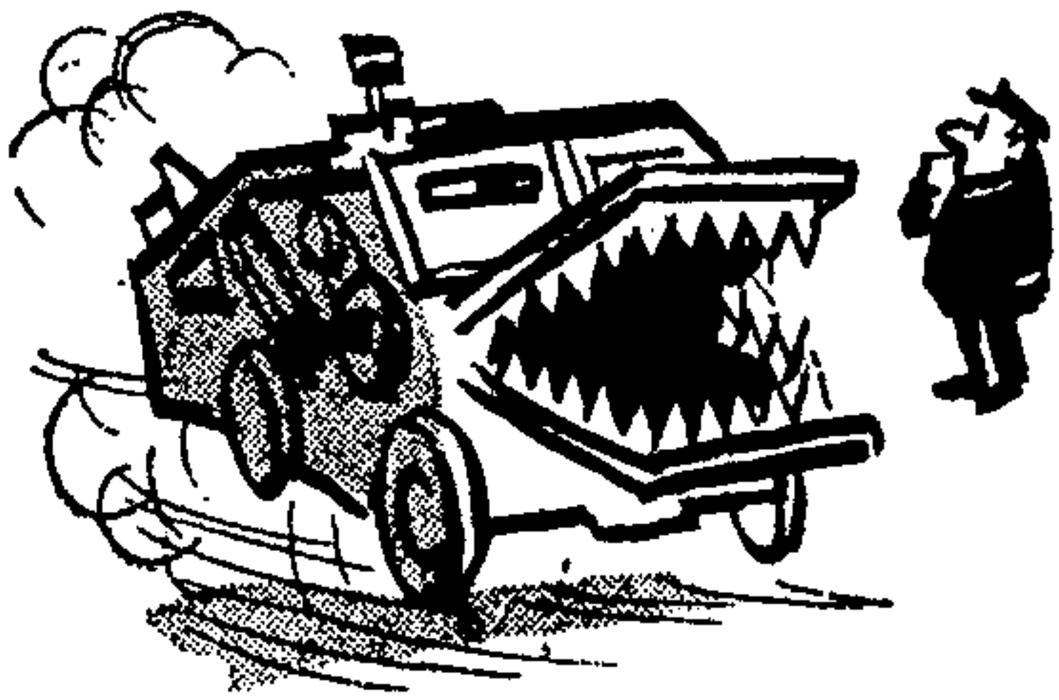


Log Book

HARVEST-TIME is also one-up-on-the-Joneses time for farmers, when they vie with each other in producing larger and stranger combines to cut and batter the crops. Recently we spent a day wandering awestruck round an immense agricultural show which demonstrated the latest lines in remote-control husbandry. At the end of it we had two criticisms to offer: first, that while the various machines on show were plainly the most up-to-date and efficient of their kind, it was sometimes very difficult to discover what they were intended to *do*; and second, that there was a notable lack of the mirthful song, country dancing, pitchfork-prodding and back-slapping that we associate with the English peasantry and yeomanry.

We have therefore recast our own ideal agricultural show in the form of an operetta.

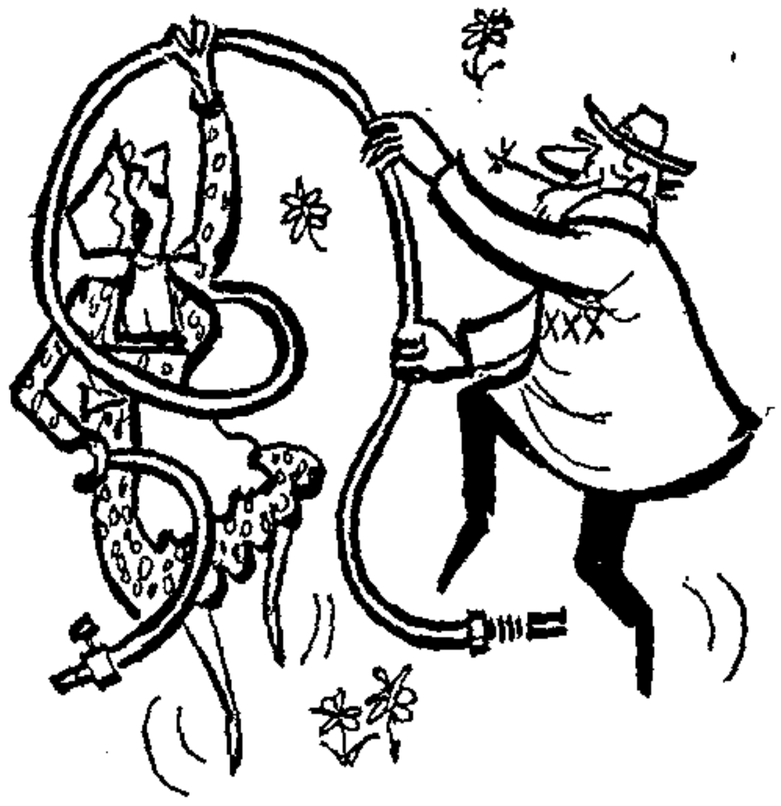
Enter chorus of farmers and village maidens, dancing and singing, and demonstrating each gadget in turn (on each other where possible) with shouts of laughter.

FARMERS: Everyone uses Middex except the most arrant mugs
You get snappy, willing engines from new clean efficient plugs.

1ST FARMER: The brand-new Aerocharger makes life a happy game
We can't find out its uses, but don't forget the name.

Enter two Ministry of Agriculture officials and two girls dressed as Eelworms. They dance and sing.

OFFICIALS: The menace of POTATO ROOT EELWORM can't be overstated
It won't occur to YOU if land is properly rotated.



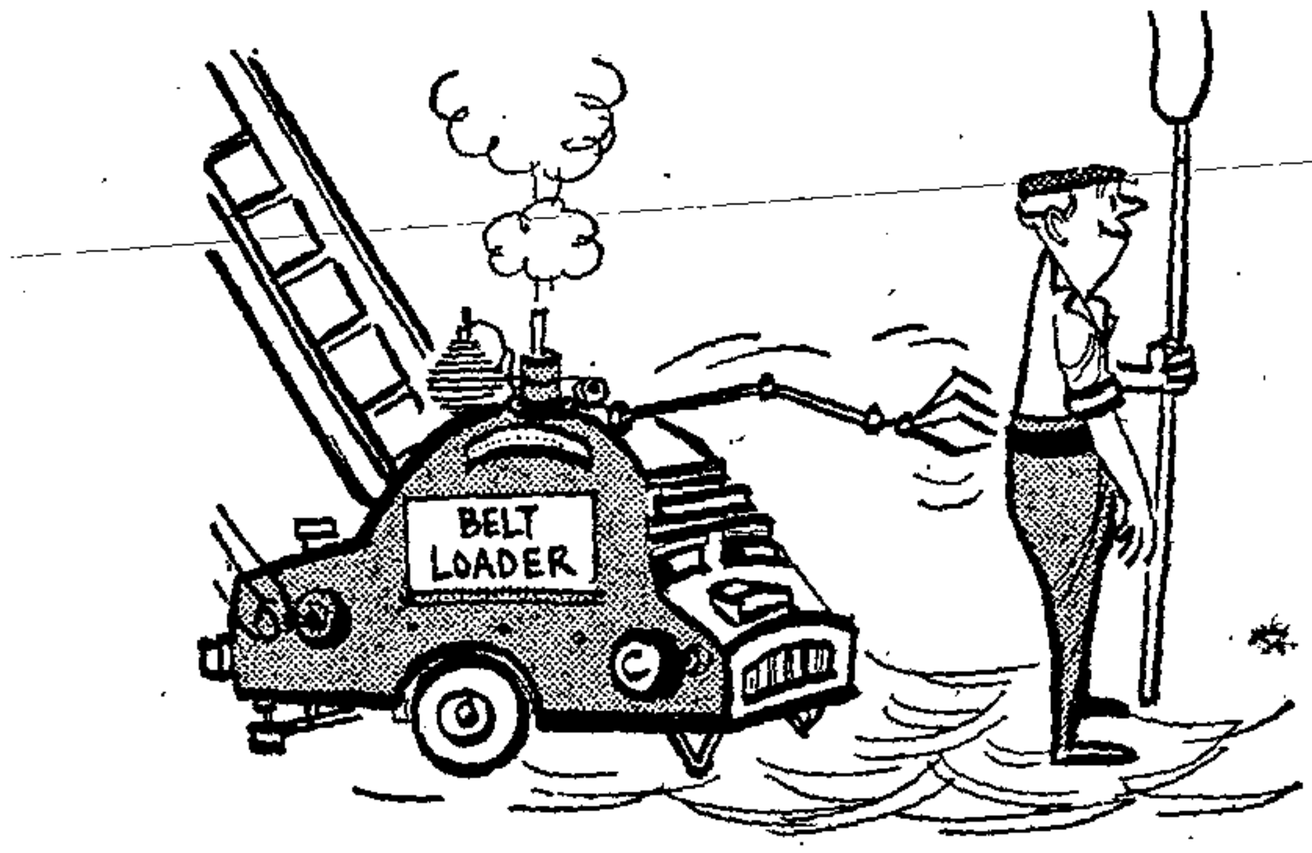
If your land has POTATO ROOT EELWORM,
please don't overcrop it
Digging self-sets and groundkeepers will also
help to stop it.

Exit Min. of Ag. officials chasing girls.

2ND FARMER: Your crops will grow so much faster and bigger
If you take to yourself a Happy Digger.
What is a Happy Digger, what is it?

FARMERS: Well, all we can tell you is that it is something between a lawnmower, a helicopter, and a brace-and-bit.

3RD FARMER: A Rogers 4-stroke with kick start
Glads the hard-worked farmer's heart.
Nothing like it for shifting muck
A Rogers 2-stroke, top-speed, universal-
swivelling, with semi-hypoid differential
back axle, dumper-skip all-purpose truck.



4TH FARMER: We can recommend to you, right up to the hilt
Cleansyk, the best diatomaceous earth filter
ever built.

1ST FARMER: The Buccaneer motor scythe and brushcutter
Fills every wish the husbandman can utter,
Functions impeccably whatever the weather
Cuts grass, weeds, bracken, blackberries,
saplings, gorse, and heather.

All 4 farmers dance and wave coloured belts.

FARMERS: Better for the farmer than a whisky-and-soda
The Cholmondelay Portable Belt Loader
It will load from dawn to dusk and then come
back for more
It will load all the portable belts you ever wore.

2ND FARMER: Happy consumers all over the map
Write to congratulate Lubritovap,
So easy to start, so simple to wind,
What do they use it for?

ALL 4 FARMERS: NEVER YOU MIND!

WHOLE CHORUS: You'll never forget what you came to know
At Argosy's Agricultural Show.

Exit, pursued by a 2-stroke, top-speed, universal-swivelling, with semi-hypoid differential back axle, dumper-skip all-purpose truck.

JOHN SILVER

A LITTLE ONE WOULD DO

Don Manolo spread his hands
in a sort of polite yawn

BY DARRELL BATES

DON Manolo de Tolosa y Merida rubbed a lean, nicotined finger slowly along the ridge of his nose. It was a long aristocratic nose, and the operation took some time.

"Do you think," he said, choosing his words carefully, "that, if the occasion arose, you could obtain for me an elephant?"

Robert Cardigan cupped both his hands round his brandy glass and looked at his guest over the rim. He saw a pair of morose hooded eyes, yellowed and slightly streaked with red, and that long aristocratic nose, and below it a thin humourless mouth. A sad serious man, he thought, not given to joking or eccentricity or unconsidered talk.

Don Manolo saw the calculation and the doubt on his host's mouth, and opened out his hands in an apologetic sort of spread.

"Is difficult? Then something smaller perhaps would be sufficient . . ." He traced a pattern on the table with the tip of his finger. ". . . perhaps," he added again, but sadly and without conviction.

It made Robert feel as if, like a crotchety parent, he had denied a child a perfectly reasonable request. He got up and leaned over the rail of the verandah and looked at the dark line of the hills against the brilliantly starred blue-black sky. It was in those hills, he knew, that the elephant were.

"Perhaps," he said, turning to look at his guest, "we could talk about it again in the morning?" He felt better when he had said that, as if after all he hadn't quite closed the door, and there was always the chance that by the next day the whole subject would have been forgotten.

Don Manolo got up too from his chair and joined Robert at the verandah rail.

"Is very quiet," he said. "Is beautiful."

The only sound it seemed in all the wide empty night was the burr-burr-burr of the cicadas; but as they looked and listened, another sound came to their ears quickly and harshly to remind them where they were.

"What animal is that?" asked Don Manolo.

"A hyena," said Robert.

"Is nice?" asked Don Manolo, with a quick light of interest in his hooded eyes. "Is nice pet?"

"No," said Robert, and again he felt like an irritable parent, as the light seeped sadly away from Don Manolo's eyes.

Later, listening still, they heard another sound. A scream. But soon it was followed by a laugh, a rippling provoking female laugh that came to them easily and fluently in the clear, clean air of the African night.

"Is a woman," said Don Manolo.

And for the first time since he had arrived at Robert's house he smiled.

Robert lay in his bed afterwards staring at the ceiling and thinking. It was just a week ago that he had heard that he would have a visitor. Robert was in charge of a small remote piece of Africa that the British many years before had reluctantly and absent-mindedly painted red. Now the colour was running the other way, and they were busy getting out.

To encourage them in this process there came from time to time commissions and experts and zealous restless females of uncertain age. They came from every quarter of the globe. They asked lots of questions and wrote down the answers in notebooks bound in black leather, or on the back of envelopes.

Robert had heard about these experts but he had never actually seen one. They usually went to the towns, where the politicians lived, or to areas where there had been a famine or a riot. Robert's district was a quiet peaceful place, rather off the beaten track, and none of these people had ever come there before.

DON MANOLO DE TOLOSA Y MERIDA, the telegram had said, spelling it out in full, as if to impress, HAS EXPRESSED A SPECIAL WISH TO VISIT YOUR DISTRICT.

Robert could not think why on earth anyone with such a long and distinguished name should want to visit the place. Nothing ever happened there except that sometimes there was too much rain and sometimes there wasn't enough. If one asked about the place, people would shrug their shoulders, "Umbulu? Nice country, they say, and nice people. The girls are rather good-looking but they file their teeth. There are several interesting prehistoric caves with some rather odd paintings on the walls. Used to be a good place for elephant, in the good old days . . ."

It was mostly hearsay stuff. Not many people had actually been there themselves.

Robert scratched his head and yawned. He couldn't think of any reason why an expert from Guatemala, (or was it Nicaragua?) should so especially want to come here. Don Manolo had been very polite but he hadn't given any indication at all of why he had come or what his special interests were, except of course that rather odd remark about an elephant . . . Robert yawned again, and soon he was fast asleep.

Next morning Don Manolo came down to breakfast with a large black book under his arm. He laid it on the table beside his plate. "Is for notes," he said, with a thin humourless smile, "of interesting things, and bad things."

"Ah," said Robert. He smiled but he was beginning to feel a little apprehensive. He couldn't think of any particularly bad things but few of the people here had much in the way of possessions, if one judged by Western standards, and they lived mostly in huts of mud and thatch, and some of their customs were—well, people who had spent all their lives in towns in Europe or in America might find them a bit unusual. Perhaps these were the sort of things that would be commented on adversely in the large black book. LOW STANDARD OF LIVING—PRIMITIVE CUSTOMS—MISERABLE HOVELS. Robert could see the headlines like spots in front of his eyes. And yet Don Manolo seemed such a quiet, mild man. To Robert's relief, nothing more was said about an elephant.

Don Manolo went off soon after breakfast with a jeep and an interpreter, and he didn't come back until the sun was low over the hills. He looked hot and tired but he gave the impression somehow, Robert noted with alarm, of having had a good day. The large black book looked as if it had been in constant use.

Perhaps it was because he had had a busy day and was tired; but all through dinner Don Manolo hardly said a word. He seemed to be thinking about something, and occasionally his thin lips would turn down slightly at the corners. Robert wasn't sure though if it was displeasure or a smile.

Suddenly Don Manolo looked up, and this time when his lips moved it really was a smile.

"Is nice people here," he said. "Is nice teeth."

"Oh yes?" said Robert. He liked the people of the district very much himself but they weren't everybody's cup of tea, particularly the sharp filed teeth. For some reason which Robert didn't know, it was only the women who filed their teeth. He asked Don Manolo if he had noticed this.

"Si," said Don Manolo. "Si, si, si. It is written here." He patted the black book.

Oh lord! thought Robert, I wonder what he's going to make of that.

"I think," Don Manolo said, "that after all I will require an elephant. But," he added, as if out of politeness he wished to make things easier for his host, "a little one would do."

"But . . ."

"Is difficult? Is expensive? I pay. I pay everything, my friend."

"How soon would you . . .?"

"Three, four days. Who knows?"

The man must be a little mad, Robert thought, but I suppose that I ought to try to get him one. He sounds like an important sort of chap. Robert liked him too.

"Very well," he said. "I will see what I can do."

The next day Don Manolo again set off after breakfast. He didn't return until after dark. This was a great help to Robert as he had had a busy day. He too set off after breakfast but in a different direction. He went towards the hills, to a small straggling village of huts shaped like beehives in a hollow on the slope of the hills where the trees began.

He talked to the people who lived there—small-boned people they were, and slim, with skins the colour of milky coffee, but the men were wiry and tough and they were great hunters.

"Yes," they said. "Perhaps—but it will be difficult and dangerous. The herd will not be pleased if we trap one of the young ones. But it can be done, with God's help, and time and luck and—" They spread their hands delicately. They were polite people who rarely spoke openly of money.

"Do you want me to come," Robert asked, pointing at the canvas-covered case that held his rifle, "to help you?" They hunted elephant with spears and pits and, when they were on their own and safe from the Government eyes, with arrows tipped with poison.

"No," they said. "Thank you, but no. We should be better on our own."

"But . . ."

"With God's help we will succeed, and survive." God was a Thing, to these gentle coffee-coloured people, that lived in trees and stones and hills and in the shape of the small-boned bird, the hoopoe, that was as fragile and as fleet and as courageous as themselves.

The next day, and the next, Don Manolo went out early and returned late, after the sun had set. He said very little, and when

Robert asked him tentatively what he had been doing and where, he spread his hands in a sort of polite yawn and shook his head sadly and slowly.

"Is interesting this place," was all he would say. "Is nice."

"Have you—" Robert hesitated, "have you noticed any—er—particularly bad things?"

"Ah," said Don Manolo, and unexpectedly he smiled. "Thanks be to God, yes, I have seen some very bad things." He rubbed his finger again along the ridge of his long aristocratic nose that was partly Spanish and partly something much more ancient and remote. Mayan, perhaps, Robert thought, or Carib.

"Beautifully bad things," he added, as if in afterthought.

He is really rather odd, Robert thought, but I can't help liking him all the same. He wondered how his hunter friends were getting on with the elephant. Every evening Don Manolo asked about it.

"When," Robert asked, smiling to avoid any suggestion of offence, "do you expect to leave?"

"After tomorrow, if you permit," he said, "the day after that I must go."

"Then you would like the elephant in two days?"

"Please, yes," said Don Manolo, "please." He sounded like a small boy coveting a visit to a circus, or an airgun. "Is important," he added, to set the seal on Robert's apprehension.

"I cannot promise—" he began.

"I know. I know. But please to try. Tomorrow," he went on, "I go to the caves again."

"Ah," said Robert. So that was where Don Manolo's interests lay. He smiled in relief.

"Why you smile?" asked Don Manolo. "You know?"

"Yes," said Robert. "I've been there. They are interesting, aren't they?" The paintings were very graphic, but some of them were unorthodox and rather crude.

"Yes," said Don Manolo. "Is the truth. Tomorrow I go there again, and," he added, "I not come back until the morning time. Is all right?"

"Is all right," Robert said, and blushed slightly at his unconscious repetition of the phrase.

The following evening the hunters came to Robert's house. There were seven of them. They had their spears in their hands but there was no sign of an elephant. Robert went out on to the verandah to meet them. From his window he had watched them coming up the hill in a sad-looking single file.

"No luck?" he asked. He hadn't really expected that in so short a time they could succeed. But he had hoped, all the same, partly for his own and partly for Don Manolo's sake.

"Plenty of luck," they said. "Luck, luck, luck," they added to emphasise the point. "But the luck was bad."

"Oh," said Robert.

"Yes," they said. "There were no baby elephant. So—" they turned their heads aside in embarrassment— "we took a big one."

Dear God, thought Robert, what have I done? But before he could ask where the elephant was, the men started to speak again.

"That is not all of the bad luck. By accident we also killed another elephant."

Robert sighed and groaned to himself. To kill an elephant, without a licence, was a very punishable offence, but he knew already that in this particular case there was nothing he could do about it.

"Was it a fat elephant?" he asked with a grim sort of smile. "Full of meat?"

"Yes," they said, "by chance it was. The tusks," they added as an afterthought, "if you would like them, are quite big." They spread their hands as if to encompass the distance to the moon, and an enormous profit.

It was killed, Robert thought out the words of his explanatory letter in advance, *in defence of crops, and the tusks have been placed in the Government ivory store.* He felt better after that and shook hands with all the hunters.

"Bring the elephant then," he said, "in the morning, and you will be paid." He wondered how on earth they were going to include the elephant in Don Manolo's luggage. A small one could be lashed and secured in a three-ton truck, but a large one was a different matter. It looked as if Don Manolo might have to walk if he wanted to take the elephant with him.

Don Manolo didn't return until it was nearly midday. He looked tired, and a little sad, but his lips were curved slightly in a very ancient kind of smile. He walked up the steps of the verandah, and when he reached the top he saw the elephant, tethered to a tree. He looked at Robert, and then again at the elephant, and sat down in a chair.

"Is whisky?" he asked politely, in a quiet voice.

"Yes," said Robert.

Don Manolo drank the whisky in one long, throat-shuddering gulp and put his glass on the table.

"Perhaps," he said, "I should explain.

"I," he started, "Don Manolo de Tolosa y Merida, am a

connoisseur. A connoisseur," he added again, spreading his hands in an apologetic spread, " of ladies."

" Oh," said Robert. He had not expected this, or anything like it. Don Manolo didn't somehow look that sort of man.

" The ladies of this place were spoken of to me. ' They are small,' they said. I like small ladies. ' They are the colour of chocolate with much milk.' I like this colour. ' They have the teeth,' they said, ' sharp like the needle.' I have not ever seen this last thing so I arrange, I arrange, I arrange, and I come here to see."

" Ah," said Robert. He was beginning to understand, but still not quite.

" So," said Don Manolo, " you see . . .? "

" No," said Robert, after a long pause, " I'm afraid I don't."

" No? "

Robert wondered if he were being obtuse. But " No," he said again, with finality.

" Well . . . You see, amigo mio. I have the wife. She is of Mexico, my wife, from Yucatan. Is beautiful, is pure, is like the puma. The puma, you understand? "

" Like a leopard or a tiger? "

" So. Like a she-tiger—yes. Now you see . . .? "

Robert shook his head. He was afraid his guest must think he was very stupid.

Don Manolo stood up and placed his hand on the back of the chair in a melodramatic gesture.

" Don Manolo de Tolosa y Merida, he do cruel things, bad things—how you say?—naughty things, but he never tell a lie.

" So," he went on, when he saw the still empty, uncomprehending look in his host's face, " so each time I go away and do a bad thing with other ladies I tell my wife. She is angry. She glare. She scratch me. She bite the hand." He showed the scars on his fingers and wrist proudly like a survivor from Balaclava.

" So each time I do a bad thing I make a present. And then she smile, a little at first and then much, and then she kiss and hug, and say, ' You bad man, Manolo, but I like. Yes, I like . . .' "

" I still don't see," Robert said, " quite how the elephant comes into it. Surely you don't mean—? "

" But yes, I do mean. For a small bad thing a small present. For a big bad thing a big present. And each time, to be correct, it must come from the place where the bad thing happened."

" It must cost you a lot of money sometimes." Don Manolo, he knew, had been at different times to both Tierra del Fuego and Lapland, and once to the Sandwich Islands.

"When I come here I feel it here and here and here," he patted his heart, and then his head, and then his stomach, "that it will be a very big bad thing. So I ask you to find for me an elephant . . . You see?"

"Yes," said Robert. At last he did see, or thought he did. "But tell me, how are you going to take the elephant with you all the way to—" Again he couldn't remember whether it was Guatemala or Nicaragua—"to America?"

"Is more whisky please?" All the eagerness and life that had come into Don Manolo's face and eyes and hands when he was speaking before seemed to have drained away. It was suddenly very quiet there on the verandah, and the only sound was the buzzing of the flies, and away beyond the house the deep bass rumble of indigestion and indignation in the belly of the elephant.

"I regret, but now I do not want the elephant." He spoke with infinite sadness and regret.

"You do not—" Robert began, aghast.

"No. Is no need. Was no big, bad thing. Was nothing at all."

Don Manolo got up and offered his hand.

"Am sorry. Am ashamed. I, Don Manolo, am ashamed. Please to forgive that I failed to do any bad thing in your place. Is rude. Is terrible—"

"O.K.," said Robert, "O.K." He felt a sadness for Don Manolo, and a great liking. The hunters would have to be paid, of course, but the elephant could be taken back to the hills and set free. "It doesn't matter at all."

Don Manolo pulled some notes from his pocket.

"Is enough?" he said. It was more than enough, Robert saw. "Please to take more. To cover the shame of it."

"I am so sorry." Robert felt somehow as if he hadn't done his duty as a host. They walked down the steps of the verandah to where the car and the lorries were waiting for Don Manolo's departure.

"There is a saying in England," Robert said suddenly, "that even a Bishop is allowed one lie in a lifetime."

"Is true? Is really true?"

"Yes," said Robert. He blinked, but he hoped Don Manolo would think it was just the midday sun.

He saw a gleam of hope come into Don Manolo's eye, and for a moment he saw him look towards the tree where the elephant was. "But only a small one," said Robert firmly.

"Better a small one," said Don Manolo in Spanish, "than none at all."

"Look," said Robert, putting his hand on his guest's arm, "inside my house I have a pretty, stuffed bird in a cage. It is a

bird of this place called a hoopoe. It is like the people of this place, small and fragile and fleet and courageous. Take it and say that it is for a small sin committed in this place."

Don Manolo looked doubtful, but there was nevertheless a light of interest in his yellowed hooded eyes.

"Then your reputation is saved," Robert went on. "Your wife gets a pretty bird, and you will be like an English Bishop. And when you look at the bird you will remember perhaps this place, and your stay here, and me—and the elephant."

"This bird," Don Manolo asked, "has a long beak? Is sharp? Is sharp like this?" He pulled up the sleeve of his shirt, and Robert saw the marks where somebody's teeth had bitten deep into the flesh just above the elbow.

Robert looked at the marks, and nodded. "Yes," he said, and then he looked at Don Manolo and smiled, and Don Manolo looked back at him into his eyes, and smiled too, and together the two men, arm in arm, went back up the steps and into the room at the end of the verandah.

Soon afterwards they came out again, and this time Don Manolo was carrying a cage. Inside the cage was the hoopoe, its crest erect and proud, and its long curved beak poised as if to transfix a grasshopper, or a passing butterfly . . .

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THE JUNGLE HUSBAND

Dearest Evelyn, I often think of you
Out with the guns in the jungle stew
Yesterday I hittapotamus
I put the measurements down for you but they got lost in the fuss
It's not a good thing to drink out here
You know, I've practically given it up dear.
Tomorrow I am going alone a long way
Into the jungle. It is all grey
But green on top
Only sometimes when a tree has fallen
The sun comes down plop, it is quite appalling.
You never want to go in a jungle pool
In the hot sun, it would be the act of a fool
Because it's always full of anacondas, Evelyn, not looking ill-fed
I'll say. So no more now, from your loving husband, Wilfred.

STEVIE SMITH

TWENTY PIECES OF SILVER

BY STAN BARSTOW

WHEN the Misses Norris, in pursuance of their good works, called on little Mrs. Fosdyke at her tiny terrace house in Parker Street she answered their discreet knock dressed for going out. They apologised then in their quiet, genteel way and said they would call again. But Mrs. Fosdyke beckoned them into the house. "I've just come in," she said. "A minute or two earlier and you'd have followed me down the street." It was then that the Misses Norris realised that Mrs. Fosdyke was dressed in black, the hat shop-bought, the coat probably run up on her own machine, and, as if reading their minds, she said, "I've just been to a funeral," and the Misses Norris murmured "Oh?" for no one of their acquaintance had died during the past week.

They sat down when asked to, the elder Miss Norris on the edge of the armchair by the table, legs tucked neatly away behind her skirt; the younger Miss Norris upright on a chair by the window. Mrs. Fosdyke slipped off her coat and occupied herself with kettle and teapot at the sink in the corner.

"You'll have a cup o' tea?" she asked, the spoon with the second measure poised over the pot.

"Well . . ." the younger Miss Norris began, and her sister said, with the poise and grace of her extra years, "You're very kind."

"I hate funerals," Mrs. Fosdyke said conversationally as she poured boiling water into the pot. "If it's anybody you thought anything of it upsets you; and if it's somebody you didn't like you feel a hypocrite."

She took two more cups and saucers from the cupboard over the sink, wiping them thoroughly on the teatowel before setting them out alongside her own on the oilcloth-covered top of the clothes-wringer under the window.

"Was it a relative?" the younger Miss Norris ventured.

Mrs. Fosdyke shook her head. "No, a friend. A good friend. Mrs. Marsden from up Hilltop. Don't know if you knew her. A widow, like me: her husband died five or six years

Frustration can be destructive. It can also be very profitable. For Yorkshire-born Stan Barstow it produced a succession of short stories, the Book Society Choice and film, A Kind of Loving, and a place in the literary sun alongside compatriots John Braine and David Storey.

The son of a miner, he won a scholarship to grammar school which he frankly admits he never justified, and from there progressed to the drawing office of an engineering works. Prodded by utter mental stagnation, he turned to writing, first short stories, then a novel which was promptly turned down by everyone who saw it. Never having entertained any grandiose ideas of sudden fame and fortune, he returned quite happily to short stories. The B.B.C. was interested and this was good. Even better was the conviction when he began his second novel that here was the break-through he'd been seeking. It was. A third is now on the way. He's still at the engineering works, preferring the security of a regular job to the uncertain ivory tower existence of a full-time author. And he's still writing short stories. This is his first for Argosy.

back. Used to be something in textiles over Bradford way. Quite well-to-do, they were. Poor dear . . . She had cancer, y'know. It was a happy release for her."

She poured the tea, handing the Misses Norris a cup each, and passing the sugar bowl and milk jug to each in turn. She herself remained standing, sipping her tea, between the wringer and the sink, the late morning sun lighting the grey hair below the little black hat.

"Funny," she said reflectively, between sips. "Fifteen years I'd known Mrs. Marsden, and it might only have been a month or two. Funny how friendships start . . .

"I answered an advertisement in the *Argus*, y'know. That's how I came to go in the first place. Jim was alive then and he'd just taken to his wheelchair. I was looking for work, but I couldn't take on a full-time job because of having him to see to. So I got a few cleaning jobs that kept me busy six mornings a week. Mrs. Marsden's was one of them. Three mornings, I went to her.

"I didn't think I was going to stick it at first. There was nothing wrong with the job or the money, mind; but they hadn't started running buses up to Hilltop at that time, and it was a mile and a half uphill from town. A rare drag, it was, and it seemed to get longer and steeper and harder every morning I went there. Anyway, I needed the money, and that was that.

"I knew when Jim first went down it wouldn't be easy, but

I told meself we'd manage. Just so long as I could keep going."

The Misses Norris, neither of whom had ever done anything more strenuous about a house than vacuum a carpet, murmured in sympathy and understanding and sipped their tea.

"Well, it wasn't too bad when I'd got used to it—the going out and cleaning, I mean. We managed. Mrs. Reed next door kept her eye on Jim in the mornings, and I did my own cleaning and my shopping in the afternoons. We'd always been ones for simple pleasures. We liked the Chapel. There were the services on Sundays, and the Women's Bright Hour on Wednesday afternoons, and I used to park Jim's chair in the porch where he could hear the singing and watch what was going on in the street. And then there were the Saturday night concerts in the schoolroom—though they don't have so many of them nowadays—and anybody who was willing did a turn. I can see Jim's face now, all flushed and cheerful, his head nodding to the music . . ."

"He was a brave and cheerful man, Mrs. Fosdyke," said the elder Miss Norris. "We all admired his courage."

"Aye, aye—well, of course, you know all about the Chapel and the Bright Hour, an' that.

"Well, Mrs. Marsden made me realise you could be well off and still unhappy. That you could be lacking in peace and quietness of mind even with no money worries, and a husband in reasonable health.

"I remember the first time we talked as woman to woman. It came up because it was Wednesday and I wanted to finish prompt on twelve so's I could get done at home in time for the Bright Hour. It was my first week with Mrs. Marsden and I had to explain the position.

"'I don't mind stopping a bit extra on Mondays and Fridays, if you need me,' I said; 'but I shouldn't like to miss my Bright Hour on a Wednesday.'

"'I'm sure I shouldn't like to be the one to keep you away,' she said, and there was something a bit odd in her voice that puzzled me. But nothing more was said till the Wednesday after, and then she brought it up herself, and this queer something in her voice was there again, and I asked her if she didn't go to a place of worship herself, then.

"'I used to,' she said, 'a long time ago. I used to go regularly. I was brought up in the Church. I was on several committees. I worked like a slave for it.'

"'And what ever made you give it up, then?' I said.

"'I lost all reason for going,' she said.

"I was a bit shocked then. 'You mean,' I said, 'you lost your faith in God?'

" As soon as I'd said it, of course, I was sorry I'd pried. It was none of my business, after all.

" And then after a minute she said, ' Yes.' Just like that: straight out.

" I remember clearly as if it was yesterday, knocking off the vacuum cleaner and looking at her. I knew lots of people who never went to either Chapel or Church, but I'd never come face to face with one who said straight out they were atheist. Because that's what it amounted to.

" So I said to her, ' Well, I mean, it's none of my business, but what ever did that to you? '

" And she rolled her duster up and her face went all hard. ' I had a boy,' she said. ' He died.'

" I could sympathise with her. ' That's terrible,' I said. ' But lots of people—'

" ' But this was *my* boy,' she said. ' For ten years we prayed for a child. We prayed and prayed, and then eventually he came. He was an imbecile. He died when he was three. Have you ever had an idiot child, Mrs. Fosdyke? ' she said, and she was so twisted up with bitterness inside her I could hardly look at her.

" So I said, no, I hadn't. ' But I've seen a fine God-fearing man struck down in his prime and condemned to spend the rest of his days in a wheelchair,' I said. ' I can sympathise with you, Mrs. Marsden.'

" ' And yet you still believe,' she said, and she was full of impatience and anger. ' How can you believe in a God of love who allows these things? '

" Well, I thought what to say to her; and then I said, ' Well, I look at it this way. It'd be easy to believe if everything in the world was fine and easy. Anybody could believe with no trouble at all. But that's not God's way. He has to send suffering to try us, to steel us and purify us.'

" ' Oh, stuff and nonsense,' she said. ' I've heard it all before. What does a child know of these things? '

" ' I know, I know,' I said. ' It's hard to understand. But how can he exempt children? There has to be danger for them, just like grown-ups.'

" So she just turned her back on me then and polished away at the dresser. And she spun round on me in a second. ' But how can you reconcile yourself to it? ' she said. ' How can you accept it? '

" ' It's one of those things you can't argue out, Mrs. Marsden,' I said. ' You can talk about it till Domesday and get no forrader. It's something you've got to feel. And I reckon you either feel it

or you don't. How can I accept it, you say. Why, what else can I do? If I lose that, I've nothing else left.' And I looked at her and I said, 'But you do miss it, don't you, you poor dear?'

"I'd gone a bit too far there. She drew herself up and went all chilly. She was a very thin woman, you know, and she could look very proud when she set herself. 'I don't need your pity, thank you,' she said. 'What you believe is your own business . . . You can finish the carpet now,' she said, 'if you don't mind.'

"I was sorry afterwards that it had happened. I was beginning to find in this business of going into other women's homes that a friendly but respectful relationship was the best on both sides, and I didn't want to spoil anything . . .

"Another cup? Oh, go on; it'll just be wasted if you don't . . . That's right."

The two Misses Norris allowed their cups to be refilled, and since they had nothing else to do that morning which could not be done later, settled back in comfort to hear whatever else Mrs. Fosdyke would tell them of her relationship with the late Mrs. Marsden.

"She wouldn't leave it alone, though," Mrs. Fosdyke said. "She seemed to be waiting for chances to bring it up again. She seemed to have to get rid of that sourness and bitterness inside her. I didn't like it, and I did think of leaving her. But I decided I could stand it. She wasn't a bad employer otherwise, and I needed the money. Pride has to take a bit of a back seat when you're in the position I was in then.

"Anyway, I'd been working for her for six months, and one Wednesday I went up there as usual. The mornings passed quickly, and it seemed like twelve o'clock came almost before I'd gotten started. As I was putting my things on to go, Mrs. Marsden remembered two things at once. She wanted me to leave one of her husband's suits at the cleaners, and she had to nip out to see a neighbour who'd be going out at any minute.

"So she came into the kitchen with the suit draped all any-old-how over her arm. 'Here we are,' she said. 'He hasn't worn it for some time. I'd like to see if it will clean up decently. Now if I don't hurry I shall miss Mrs. Wilson. You'll find paper and string in that cupboard; and you might just go through the pockets before you wrap it up. I haven't time myself.' And with a last reminder to drop the latch as I went out, she was off.

"I had a look at the suit then. It looked nearly new to me, and I thought to myself, 'Fancy being able to cast aside a suit like this.' I hadn't got to the stage of begging clothes, but I was tempted at times. Jim had never had a suit like that in his life.

"Well, I took each part of it and brushed it down with the flat of my hand and went through all the pockets. When I got to the trousers I more felt than heard something crackle in one of the pockets, and when I put my hand in I pulled out a pound note, folded in two. So from thinking about Mr. Marsden discarding good clothes I got to thinking about a 'carry on' that could allow a pound note to be lost without being missed.

"I popped it down on a corner of the kitchen cabinet and wrapped the suit in brown paper. I found myself glancing sideways at the note. Who knew about it but me? A pound . . . twenty shillings. What was a pound to the Marsdens? And what was a pound to Jim and me? There were few enough ever came our way, and every one was hard earned, every shilling to be held on to till I couldn't help spending it. Things had been tight lately too. We'd had a lot of expense. I took the note into my hand and thought of all it could buy. Fruit for Jim, and a bit of tobacco—always a special treat. And he needed new underclothes. And I'd planned to get him a bottle of the tonic wine that seemed to buck him up so.

"So I stood there in Mrs. Marsden's kitchen with her husband's pound note screwed up in a little ball in my hand where nobody else could see it; and it was just as though there was nothing else in the world but that note and my need of it."

Mrs. Fosdyke's voice had grown softer as she spoke and now it died away altogether as she stopped speaking and gazed out through the window. The two sisters exchanged a swift glance before she stirred and turned to put her empty teacup on the draining-board.

"Well, that was on a Wednesday, like I said. And on the Friday I went up to the house again. I was there at nine—my usual time. I remember distinctly that it was a rainy morning. Not heavy rain, but that thin, fine stuff that seems to wet you through more thoroughly than an out-and-out downpour. Anyway I was soaked by the time I got there, and when I'd changed into my working shoes, I took my coat upstairs to let it drip into the bath. Then I helped Mrs. Marsden with the few breakfast pots and we got going on the downstairs rooms, like we always did on a Friday.

"She was a bit quiet that morning, Mrs. Marsden was, and I thought perhaps she wasn't feeling too well. At eleven we knocked off for five minutes and went into the kitchen for a cup of tea and a biscuit. And then Mrs. Marsden said, just casual like, 'By the way,' she said, 'Mr. Marsden seems to think he left some money in that suit you took to the cleaners. Did you find anything when you looked through the pockets?'

" I'd clean forgotten about it till she mentioned it. I put my cup down and got up and felt under one of the canisters on the shelf. ' You didn't see it, then? ' I said. ' I popped it up there on Wednesday. I meant to mention it, but I get more forgetful every day. That's all there was: just the odd note.' I wondered she didn't notice the tremble in my fingers as I handed it to her.

" She spread the note out by her plate and said she'd give it to Mr. Marsden when he came home. And I said it was funny that he'd bethought himself about it after all that time. I remembered she'd said he hadn't worn the suit for some time.

" ' Well,' she said, ' you see—er—er.' And she got all sort of tongue-tied then and I knew there was something wrong somewhere. I didn't like the look on her face, for a start. And then it came over me all at once.

" ' Why,' I said, ' I believe you put that money in your husband's suit. I don't think he knows anything about it. You put it there deliberately, hoping I'd take it and say nothing.'

" She went red then; her face coloured like fire. ' I have to test the honesty of my servants,' she said, sort of proud like, but uneasy under it.

" And it got my rag out, that did. I was blazing mad. ' Well, you tested mine,' I said. ' And if it's any joy to you, I'll admit I was sorely tempted. Isn't it enough that you should lose your way without making me lose mine? A pound, Mrs. Marsden,' I said. ' Twenty pieces of silver. Is that my price, d'you think? They gave Judas thirty! '

" She got up. ' I don't have to take this kind of talk from you,' she said, and brushed past me and ran upstairs.

" I sat down at the table and put my head in my hands. I was near to tears. I couldn't understand it. I just couldn't understand what had made her do it. And I said a little prayer of thanks. ' O God,' I said, ' only You knew how near I was.'

" In a few minutes I got up and went and listened at the foot of the stairs. I went up to the bathroom and got my coat. I stood for a minute then. There was no place for me here in future, I thought. I felt like leaving straight away: walking out without another word. But I was due to a week's wages and I couldn't afford pride of that sort.

" So I called out softly, ' Mrs. Marsden.'

" But there was no reply. I went across the landing to her bedroom door and listened. I could hear something then, but I wasn't quite sure what it was. I called again, and when there was no reply, I tapped on the door and went in. She was lying on one of the twin beds with her face to the window. I could tell now it was sobbing I'd heard from outside, and her

shoulders shook as I stood and watched her. There was something about her that touched me right to the quick, and I put my coat down and went to her and put my hand on her shoulder. 'There, there,' I said; 'don't take on so. There's no harm done.' I sat down behind her on the bed, and all at once she put her hand up and took mine. 'Don't go away,' she said. 'Don't leave me now.'

"I remember just the feeling I had then. It was like a great rush of joy: the sort of feeling you get when you know you're wanted, that somebody needs you.

"'Of course I won't leave you,' I said. 'Of course I won't.'"

Mrs. Fosdyke sighed and turned from the window. "And I never did," she said. "I never did."

She looked at each of the sisters in turn. "Well," she said, a bashful little smile coming to her lips, "I've never told anybody about that before. But this morning sort of brought it back; and she's gone beyond harm now, poor dear."

She glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "Gracious, look at the time! And me keeping you sat with my chatter."

"But what a lovely story," said the younger Miss Norris, who was of a romantic turn of mind. "It's like something out of the Bible."

"Well, that's as may be," Mrs. Fosdyke said briskly; "but I'm sure you didn't call to hear me tell the tale."

"As a matter of fact," said the elder Miss Norris, drawing a sheaf of papers from her large handbag, "we're organising the collection for the orphanage and we wondered if you could manage this district again this year. We know how busy you are."

"Well—" Mrs. Fosdyke put her finger to her chin—"I suppose I *could* fit it in."

"You're such a *good* collector, Mrs. Fosdyke," the younger Miss Norris said. "Everybody gives so generously when you go round."

"Aye, well, I suppose I can manage it," Mrs. Fosdyke said, and the Misses Norris beamed at her.

"Oh, we know the willing hearts and hands, Mrs. Fosdyke," the elder sister said.

"I suppose you do," said Mrs. Fosdyke, with a hint of dryness in her voice.

"There'll be a place in heaven for you, Mrs. Fosdyke," gushed the younger Miss Norris.

"Oh, go on with you," Mrs. Fosdyke said. "Somebody's got to look out for the poor lambs, haven't they?"

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THE RAVINE OF NOTHINGNESS BELOW

By DICK CROSS

IN MY YOUTH I, Ssu Wu, was once bound apprentice to a floating Singing House, the flowery junk, *Tolerant Virtue*, so-named after her owner, who was also my mistress. By day, my duties were to grind corn and to ferment it into wine for the delectation of our patrons, chiefly Government Officials who administered the cities and villages along the shores of the great Yangtze Kiang.

One day, while negotiating a remote estuary known as Five Rivers, Tolerant Virtue directed that we should cast anchor in a secluded creek, there to replenish our stores and water. Imagine, then, our surprise, to observe a whole sampan-load of dignified gentlemen in scholars' hats rowing towards us at a pace which indicated extreme enthusiasm.

"Thank the gods for you!" cried one.

"Young delectable ladies at last!" exulted another.

As they clambered on board our junk, Tolerant Virtue stepped forward on her tiny bound feet, then with a low obeisance greeted them thus. "How strange that you elegant gentlemen, to the number of 7, should honour my poor junk, in which there are 7 delectable Singing Girls! Pray do me the honour of taking some wine in our humble floating house."

Now, the wine which I had recently fermented was particularly potent. Soon, the gentlemen were conversing freely, whilst we Singing Girls made music and ravished their senses with the subtle perfumes from our swaying silken sleeves. Then one of the gentlemen rose to address the company as follows:

"Madam Tolerant Virtue! The Winds of Good Fortune must have directed you and your Singing Girls hither, to enliven our scholarly and far-from-jocular retreat. We are 7 one-time

Ministers who, some moons past, retired from high office with rather more than usual rapidity. We suddenly experienced a strange but compelling desire to renounce public life upon hearing that the Board of Finance was about to audit our accounts. Being of modest disposition, we slipped away one moonless night, and discovered, upon reaching this sylvan yet remote locality, that we had inadvertently brought with us a large part of the treasure which it was our happiness and privilege to guard."

At this, Lustrous Peony, one of our Singing Girls, timidly observed, "Incalculable are the misfortunes which may result from one slip of an otherwise faultless memory! Naturally, you could not return and admit to a single error, however unwitting. Confidence in the infallibility of Public Officials might well have been shaken. Alas, for the unworthy suspicions of common men!"

The whole company sighed deeply.

We young ladies resumed our music, with strings muted, to indicate our respect for talented integrity; more wine being quickly served to restore the spirits of our distinguished but absent-minded visitors.

A second dignitary took up their tale. "When first we arrived at this secluded spot, it was uninhabited save for a Recluse and Sage, one Pu Ying, whose simple dwelling stands upon the edge of a nearby chasm, known as The Ravine of Nothingness Below. Pu Ying, once a famous alchemist, discovered a century ago a Drug of Immortality for which the Ancients had experimented in vain. I am happy to say his potion proved so successful that he is now 147 years old, and can still become tipsy every night without injury to his health. Beyond that, he has no wish

or care. An Immortal indeed, if I may venture the observation."

With a deep sigh for the Sage's 147 years of wasted animation, Tolerant Virtue replied, " Sir, would this talented Recluse care to make an exception to his rule, by visiting our poor floating home? I and my young ladies would be honoured to entertain one who bears his years so lightly. . Wine, of course, would be provided in plenty, together with any other diversion which might suit his fancy."

The Dignitaries consulted together; then, once again, their leader spoke. " Honoured Madam, it might, perhaps, be prudent for you to hear the remainder of our tale before inviting the accomplished Pu Ying to visit your elegant and sumptuous abode. When first he had the honour to meet us, we experienced an absurd though transitory impression that he was somewhat less than overjoyed at the prospect of our relieving his solitary tedium. When, later, the notorious River Pirate, Chin Wong, also arrived and set up his headquarters here, we again experienced that fleeting, yet ridiculous conception.

" ' The charms of solitude,' the Sage was heard remarking to his tame oriole, ' are shattered by this twin invasion. However, good Bird, we must remember that I am immortal, while these followers of professions so opposite in law, yet so similar in effect, are not. Let us be patient; for time solves all problems.' "

A second dignitary could barely contain his mirth, as he added, " An exquisitely humorous soliloquy, you will agree? Though naturally, only to be taken seriously by strangers, such as yourselves, who might distract this Sage's thoughts from the pleasure of our own distinguished company."

For a while we pondered. Then another Singing Girl, Precious Lotus, rejoined, " Inscrutable are the intricacies of the human mind! This Pu Ying has doubtless been so occupied in congratulating himself upon his remarkable discovery, that it has not yet occurred to him to experiment in the delights of female society. Pray be so good as to beg him to be our guest tomorrow. For 147 years without the company of women is a condition which should be remedied without delay."

This message was conveyed to the Recluse, who appeared on board the following evening, lithe as a sapling, vigorous as a tiger, despite his 147 years. Indeed, our poor efforts to entertain him met with such success that, by morning light, all but he were prostrated by the festivities. Before leaving, however, he roused us with difficulty, then spoke as follows. " Tolerant Virtue and Singing Ladies. Before returning to your modest couches,

to revivify yourselves from the fatigues which my humble visit has apparently imposed, be so good as to consent to become my guests tomorrow night, at my simple dwelling beside The Ravine of Nothingness Below.

"I shall do myself the honour of inviting, also, those 7 Ministers with whom, I understand, you have the happiness to be acquainted. I shall thus have the pleasure of entertaining together everybody who is anybody in this charming, yet until recently, secluded retreat."

Tolerant Virtue rose to her feet with some effort, and on behalf of us all, addressed the Sage thus. "Sir, I and my young ladies are honoured beyond measure at the matchless generosity of your offer. Yet, before we can permit ourselves the happiness of accepting may we venture to remind you that the Pirate Chin Wong and his band also inhabit this enchanting locality? We take it, sir, that they too will not be our fellow guests? For, indeed, were that so, the modesty for which we are renowned might be put in danger of offence."

For a moment, a frown darkened the light of benevolence in Pu Ying's dragon eyes, as he replied, "Madam, pirates are inferior persons, to be included with soldiers, horse-leeches, and makers of coffins. When I said everybody, I referred only to the enlightened members of this small, yet diverse community." With these words, he sprang nimbly into his sampan, and rowed himself shoreward as swiftly as a heron in flight. We ladies then retired once again to our couches, to repair our ravaged energy with deep, yet anticipatory slumbers.

On the following night, we presented ourselves at the Sage's dwelling, the back of which stood upon the very brink of The Ravine of Nothingness Below. The Ministers had already arrived, and we made merry on a sumptuous repast, each dish of which was interspersed with our music, dancing, and the delights of friendly intercourse.

Suddenly, there came a thunderous knocking upon the front door.

We remained still, frozen like icicles with terror, as a loud and dreadful voice cried, "Recluse Pu Ying! I am the Pirate Chin Wong! My band, of whom there are 7 (including myself) fear that we have lost face by not having been invited to your delectable feast. Are we dogs, to be treated with such discourtesy? Open your door, that we may exterminate both you and those ministers whom you deem worthy of your company. Only thus can we avenge the humiliation under which we labour."

Setting his jade lips to the keyhole, the Sage replied in firm,

yet modest tones, " Sir, we have the happiness to be entertaining ladies. Be so good, therefore, as to moderate your language. As to your proposal to exterminate me, you know well that I have swallowed a Pill of Immortality and cannot be harmed. Pray then, grant the favour of a few moments, while these ministers with me utter a last prayer to the Goddess of Pity. Our lady guests, meanwhile, will compose themselves to witness the awful carnage which it is your intention to perpetrate."

The Pirate agreed to this momentary respite, and remained outside with his men, soliloquising upon the beauty of the moonlit night. Meanwhile Pu Ying presented the ministers each with a Pill of Immortality which they quickly swallowed. Then he cautiously unlatched his back door which opened on to The Ravine of Nothingness Below, and whispered, " Now, gentlemen, you may save yourselves from otherwise unavoidable slaughter; for my Pill will enable you to skim across to the farther shore of this ravine in safety. You may then proceed to use the remainder of your immortality in any manner suited to your inclinations. Gentlemen, good-bye! "

For a moment the distinguished guests hesitated; until, hearing the Pirate knock once more upon the front door, they stepped hastily into the ravine. To our surprise, we imagined that we heard a sound as of 7 Ministers descending rapidly through space; but the Sage assured us that we were in error. He then unlocked his front door and the pirate band rushed in with drawn swords.

Upon discovering the back door ajar and the ministers gone, they stopped in amazement. Chin Wong cried reproachfully, " Perfidious Sage! Tell us! Where have you been so ill-bred as to conceal those victims of our displeasure? "

The Sage smiled, and with a low bow, replied, " Honoured Sir, ' perfidious ' is scarcely a proper expression to use in the presence of ladies. As to your inquiry, the gentlemen you seek walked out through my back door a few moments ago, having a suspicion amounting almost to a certainty that your intentions towards them were not wholly to their advantage."

At first, Chin Wong and his men were so impolite as to reject this assurance. But Pu Ying having explained the circumstance, they had no recourse but to congratulate him upon his stratagem, while Precious Lotus played a few stanzas upon her lute to celebrate the reconciliation.

This, however, so exalted the pirates, that they proposed to carry us ladies off to their lair, in compensation for their loss. But, as we gathered up our belongings in readiness to accommodate our new patrons, the Sage reproved them, stating that

this was not in accordance with the basic principles of true politeness.

Then he added, "Pirate Chin Wong! If you and your men really wish to pursue those fleeing ministers, I deem it a matter of elementary courtesy to supply you also with Pills of Immortality. You can then overtake your quarry and settle the difference between you, at your leisure. For, indeed, Eternity will give you plenty of time."

The Pirates bowed their thanks, save for one surly desperado, who addressed the Sage unflatteringly, thus, "Old man, should your Pill, which you claim will bear us across this yawning void, fail to exert its magic powers within the twinkling of an eye, what will become of us? For, the Ravine having Nothingness Below it, we shall go on falling for ever. A poor prospect for industrious pirates."

For some moments Pu Ying ruminated deeply; then replied, "Industrious Pirate. Your scholarly attributes are, I fear, of a low order. For you appear to be unaware that the Earth is flat, and this bottomless ravine goes straight through it. Should your ill-bred and unfounded doubts actually materialise, you would, of course, reappear (after a rapid, yet by no means uninteresting journey) upon the other side of the world. From there, with a little practice, you could proceed upside-down to its farthest extremity, clamber over the edge, and return home. I trust I make myself clear."

The Pirate thus addressed, knitted his brows, until Lustrous Peony modestly observed, "Surely, respected but unlettered Pirate, a moment's reflection will convince you that, should this Pill fail to prove instantly operative upon yourselves, the same will apply also to the ministers you seek? In which case, you will all meet together upon the other side of the world, and

settle your disagreement without disturbance to the rustic tranquillity of this charming district. You agree, sir?"

Despite the Sage's frown of displeasure at a mere female daring to express an opinion, all present applauded the simple wisdom of her reasoning. The Pirates swallowed their Pills without further hesitation; then, as one, they stepped out from the back door, into the ravine. Once again, we imagined we heard the sound as of persons descending through space. But, as before, the Sage assured us of our mistake. Then, turning to Tolerant Virtue, he remarked, with a bow, "Honoured Madam, in view of the circumstances so recently enacted, allow me to suggest that you and your young ladies return at once to your flowery junk and proceed elsewhere without delay. Some time may elapse before you are likely to see either the official gentlemen whom you so rightly respect, or the vulgar Pirates whom, with equal correctitude, you abhor. Farewell, ladies! I wish you a pleasant voyage and all possible happiness in your modest, though ineffable calling." With that, he bowed us out from his front door, then closed and locked it.

We walked from the Sage's door through the bamboos that fringed his dwelling, and as Tolerant Virtue counted our number to ensure that none were missing, we stopped for a moment to hear through the open window the voice of that Sage and Recluse addressing his favourite oriole thus.

"Bird! Some moons ago, I mentioned to you that Time solves all problems. It seems I was correct, and that we may now resume our bibulous and comfortable solitude. To celebrate which I propose now to become tipsy upon such of my wine as those 22 insufferable nuisances have omitted to finish. Your health, Bird! Your very good health! In another 147 years, I may, once again, feel disposed to interest myself in feminine society which, I own, does afford some symptoms of transient pleasure. But *not* Ministers, good Bird! *Not* Ministers or Pirates. For, if they are really so vain as to suppose that I appreciate their company; and so credulous as to imagine that I would supply them with genuine Immortality Pills for nothing, then it is my firm and unshakeable belief that they are best occupied with the unusual journey upon which they are now engaged. Your health again, Bird! Your most excellent health!"

This, the above, being a tale recounted by Ssu Wu to her 7 Companions of the Jade Wine Cup, upon the 7th night, of the 7th moon, in the 7th year of the reign of Ming Huang, 7th Emperor of T'ang, to whom she was 7th and most illustrious Imperial Concubine.

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The Dancers of Huai-nan by Chang Hêng (A.D. 78-139)

I saw them dancing at Huai-nan
and made this poem of praise:

Up rose the fair ones to the dance,
Well painted and apparelled,
In veils of soft gossamer
All wound and meshed . . .
The wielder of the little stick
Whispers them to their places, and the steady drums
Draw them through the mazes of the dance.
They have raised their long sleeves, they have covered
their eyes . . .

Subtly from slender hips they swing,
Swaying, slanting delicately up and down.
And like the crimson lotus flower
Glows their beauty, shedding flames afar.
They lift languid glances,
Peep distrustfully, till of a sudden
Ablaze with liquid light
Their soft eyes kindle. So dance to dance
Endlessly they weave, break off and dance again.
Now flutter their skirts like a great bird in flight,
Now toss their long white sleeves like whirling snow.
So the hours go by, till at last
The powder has blown from their cheeks, the black
from their brows,
Flustered now are the fair faces, pins of pearl
Torn away, tangled the black tresses.
With combs they catch and gather in
The straying locks, put on the gossamer gown
That trailing winds about them, and in unison
Of body, song and dress, obedient
Each shadows each, as they glide softly to and fro.

translated from the Chinese by
ARTHUR WALEY

TO CONQUER CAESAR

BY P. A. FITZHERBERT

I WAS at the bloodstock sales last week, watching my son James bidding for a chestnut filly when it happened.

James had made his last bid, and we had turned to go, when into the ring danced a great fellah of a horse: barrel-chested, bold of eye, wheeling and prancing before us like he'd a mind to be noticed.

I watched entranced, running my eyes over his powerful hindquarters and muscular ebony shoulders, for coal black he was—and handsome. The very image of that great black stallion, Caesar, I had known over forty years ago.

I was, I'm thinking, about twelve years old at the time. By all accounts a thin gangling lad, with hair as thick as a fox's brush and the same colour.

Since I had been orphaned at the age of eleven I had lived with my mother's brother, Uncle Patrick, and his wife Kate. They'd no children of their own which, I understood later, proved to be a great disappointment to my Uncle Patrick and an even greater one to my Aunt Kate.

Now my uncle was a generous man, peaceable by nature and liked by all his neighbours. Unlike most of the men in those parts he owned his own farm and—what with the farm, his wife Kate, and a pair of grand horses in the stable—life was good indeed to Uncle Patrick. He didn't, I suppose, envy a fellah in the whole world—least of all the Colonel.

The Colonel lived up at the big house. He was a large florid man who'd spent a deal of his time soldiering in godforsaken

foreign places. Gossip had it that he was a mean man, over fond of the bottle, and downright illnatured when he'd a mind to be. Sometimes I wondered if the neighbours weren't being a bit hard on the Colonel. Meself I'd met him many a time and, while I'll own he was a bit quick tempered, I'd never seen him offer violence to any living creature.

It was, I remember, shortly after I'd come to live with Uncle Patrick and Aunt Kate that I first met the Colonel—and this was the way of it.

I was walking to school. It was a fine autumn morning, and the fat globular droplets of dew sparkled in the hedgerows like the beads on my aunt's rosary. Now and again as the path narrowed I was forced against the bushes, destroying with my rough sleeves and brown-stockinged legs the soft, silvered lace-work of jewelled spiders' webs.

I was by the stile, following with my eyes the progress of a large hard-backed beetle who was stumbling sleepily past the toes of my thick boots, when my ears caught the steady, rhythmic drumming of a horse in full canter.

I turned quickly and there, pounding through the stubble, was a magnificent coal-black creature with a proud arched neck and wild wind-tossed mane.

Forgotten was school, Miss Murphy who wore a bun at the nape of her neck, and the giving out of the thick, polished rulers. Here was life, here was movement. I leaned against the stile, watching with a critical eye as a redfaced rider urged the big horse towards the wall ahead of him.

But the big black was in a real fine dander; he just lay his ears back against his head and squealed with rage, slithering to his haunches and refusing that fence as if he was the devil himself facing up for the first time to a bottle of the sweet Holy Water. Not, of course, that he wasn't able to take that wall. Sure it was only a little bit of a wall, low enough for O'Doherty's goat—who was for ever escaping and being found nibbling haystacks a mile or so away—to clamber over.

Och, I was thinking, as the rider collected the horse, cantered off, and swung him round towards the wall again, but that's a grand beast.

And then with mounting admiration I watched while the rider put the horse at the wall for the second attempt, drawing in my breath when the horse hesitated and finally, forced by hands and by heels and a will at least as strong as his own, sprang like a cat, clearing the wall with a yard or so to spare.

It was a superb piece of riding. My chest unknotted, expelling my breath in writhing grey shapes through the crisp autumnal

air, and then suddenly I was running, streaking through the stubble without a notion of what I wanted to say, knowing only that I wanted to be near that great gleaming horse and a man who could ride like that with his hands and his heels.

When I reached the wall, the horse, his muscles rippling in his powerful ebony shoulders, seemed to be standing still for a moment, but the rider, turning, stiffened in his saddle as I panted up beside them.

"And what is it, boy?" he asked, staring down at me.

"G'morning, y'honour," I said, flushing, shyness creeping over me while I stood there in my brown stockings and dew-sodden boots, "but that's the grand horse y'riding."

"A stubborn brute at times, though," he said, relaxing, settling in the saddle again. "Needs to be mastered."

"Sure," I agreed, knowing that while Uncle Patrick rode a fast, gentle little mare with impeccable manners there were other men who sought, and accepted, the challenge of a great eye-rolling horse like the big black. "But what's he called?"

"Caesar."

"That's the name of Roman emperors—" grand horseman that he was, here also was a man of imagination—"like Julius Caesar."

He smiled then. Sure I don't know why people were afraid to speak to the Colonel, his smile was friendly enough.

"You like tales of conquerors, boy?" he asked, checking the horse as it made to move forward. "Whoa, Caesar, easy now."

I nodded. "That I do, sir . . ."

For there were nights—before I'd prayed to the Virgin and drawn the coverlet back over the blankets—when Uncle Patrick, reading to me from a leather-covered book, had filled my head with tales of grand battles and images of bloody onslaughts. Nights when my Aunt Kate had been forced to declare, "Whist, Pat, y'making me own blood creep, heaven knows what y'doing to the bhoy's!"

But the big horse was moving restlessly beneath the Colonel's knees, his muscles rippling aggressively between silken shoulders.

"Ah, boy," said the Colonel, tightening the rein, "you see how it is, and interesting though this conversation promises to be, I've an appointment to keep with a man from Dublin." He inclined his head towards me in an expression of regret. "Some other time . . ."

I watched them go. Within a minute or so they had passed from my sight, the rider tall and straight in the saddle, and the big black horse with his head held high and his tail streaming out in a banner behind him. They moved perfectly together, in

unison, and at the gate in the far corner of the field that splendid animal, gathering up his great haunches, soared like a Pegasus over the bar and out into the yellowing country beyond.

And then it was I remembered school. Remembered Miss Murphy and the giving out of the thick, polished rulers. Like a hare I sped through the stubble, but an hour later my ears still rang with the drumming of hoofs, and somewhere I fancied I was riding a coal-black horse with eyes of fire and muscles of corded steel . . .

I suppose I met the Colonel about five or six times after that.

The second time, I recall, was down by the river. I had caught six fish and was trying for the seventh when, hearing a noise to the left of me, I looked up and there was the Colonel with

two dogs beside him, red-curled dogs whose coats ran like silk through your fingers when you stroked them.

"Morning," I sang out, reeling in my line, which in truth was nothing more than a whittled stick with a yard or two of stout string attached to one end, "'tis a fine day for the fishing."

"A grand morning, boy." But his eyes were on the fish at my side. "You'll not tell me you caught those fish with that rod?"

"Sure, now, an' what else would I be using?"

"But I've a rod from London that cost me a fortune," said the Colonel, indicating with a nod of his head the line in his hand, "and I've yet to catch half that number."

"Och, now, sir," I said, grinning up at him—terrible big he looked, standing there in his tweed suit and his hatband gleaming with the light, iridescent wings of fishing flies—"the fish don't heed what line ye'll be using, only what bait ye'll be offering."

The Colonel threw back his head and laughed. "Boy," he said, assuming an expression of mock severity, "perhaps even the fish can't resist a touch of the blarney."

"As ye've none y'self take half of mine then an' welcome. My aunt rolls 'em in a sprinkling of oatmeal," I added, waving aside the red dogs who were exploring my sleeve ends with damp but friendly noses.

"Ah, you made a point there," said the Colonel, still smiling. "Thank you, boy. Oatmeal, did y'say? Must remember to tell the cook."

He began to walk away, his thin elegant dogs streaking ahead between the trees like shafts of auburn sunlight. And then, turning on his heels, he whistled the dogs to his side and came striding back towards me.

"Sir," I said, slanting a look of surprise at him as he halted beside me, "did ye forget something?"

But he said nothing, only stood there staring out over the river, with tight deep lines forming at the corners of his eyes and his hand holding the rod showing white at the knuckles.

"Sir," I repeated, "an' what was it ye forgot?"

"Can you swim, boy?" he asked abruptly, turning to me.

"Och, is that all? Sure, I can swim."

"But not here," his voice rose angrily. "Promise me you'll not swim here."

"Sir, if that's what y'wanting, I'll promise," I said with a shrug. "The water's too deep an' there's more than enough weed about for my liking." And I was wondering why suddenly he looked so old, not knowing until weeks later how those few innocent words must have cut into his heart. All I saw then were his eyes dulling over with pain, and the two red dogs gazing up

at him, whimpering, sensing maybe the fear and the grief knotting together within him.

How long he stood like that I do not know, but at last, dropping his gaze, he whispered, "That's a good lad, Michael," and swung away with the dogs at his heels.

Later, as I rounded the bend which led to our farmhouse, my uncle's neat little chestnut mare raced for the hedge. Some time I meant to tell my uncle that I'd noticed a thin patch in the hedge, but now—as that soft, lovely creature with the gentle, lustrous eyes thrust her head at me and nickered down her velvet nostrils—I was busy with the thought which had been puzzling me since I'd left the river.

"Now why," I said, caressing the mare's smooth muzzle, "now why should the Colonel be calling me Michael when everyone knows that me name is John?"

I was not to see the Colonel for many weeks after, and I might well have forgotten the whole incident had not old Sean arrived one wild evening when the wind was howling in the chimneys like a banshee.

Sean Creggan and I had met before; a little bit of a fellah he was who'd travel from village to village bearing ribbons and other such trifles in a pack on his shoulders and a broad and affable grin on his wrinkled features. Sometimes I'd wonder if Sean had been raised in a bog, for he'd a smell of peat in his pockets, a sharp quizzical gleam about his blue eyes, and a tongue from which the words flowed like quicksilver.

Sean arrived as we were about to start supper but then—as Aunt Kate declared later—Sean could smell a simmering pot from near a mile away and that being only one of his many gifts.

"God bless this house," said Sean, raising his hat to Aunt Kate when she opened the door. "Is the master at home?"

"Och, Sean, come in now, 'tis no night for a man to be wandering abroad," said my uncle, jumping to his feet with delight.

"Whist, Pat," Sean exclaimed, slipping the pack from his back and dripping water over the floor, "an' wouldn't I be knowin' the kind heart o' ye would be welcomin' an ould fellah the like o' meself?"

"Sit ye down, man." Aunt Kate was setting another place at the table; she'd a soft spot for the old man ever since he'd first trotted down the lane bringing her ribbons and cottons and friendly gossip about the towns and villages through which he had travelled. "Why, ye must be freezed to the marrow."

"I am that," agreed Sean. He sniffed contentedly at the

stew and winked at me over the rim of his spoon. "There's none so good as ould friends, eh, bhoy?"

After supper Sean took his seat by the chimney. "Ah, ma'am," he sighed, filling his pipe with a twist of tobacco from Uncle Patrick's jar, "those were the best oatcakes I've tasted since the Colonel denied me his kitchen an' cut me off from the delights of the Widder Rafferty's cookin'."

"How's that then, Sean? Did ye have a difference of opinion wid the Colonel? Ye wouldn't be the first nor yet the last, I'll wager," said my uncle with a laugh.

"'Twas but a little thing." Sean emitted a frail but whirling cloud of scornful smoke. "Seems the fellah took the notion that I'd scared the Widder Rafferty wid me little tale of Black Rory's ghost. Calls me to his study next time I'm that way an' tells me the Widder Rafferty now declares she'd seen Black Rory that very night. Passed him, begob, on the stairway, an' since she can get work as a cook at any of the best houses in the country, she'll be leaving next month."

"Did the Widder Rafferty really see a ghost, Mister Creggan?" I asked, my eyes shining with delight. "Maybe 'twas just a shadow on the stair."

"No doubt, no doubt, me bucko," said Sean hastily, abashed by Uncle Patrick's chuckles and Aunt Kate's raised eyebrows. "The ould woman's a rare one for lifting the elbow. The Colonel worked hard to change her mind and promised at last to raise her wages—there bein' a danger that, in the circumstances, and on account of her havin' a weak heart, she might not be livin' long enough to enjoy the fruits of her labours."

"Whist." Aunt Kate was eyeing our visitor with a look of amazed fascination. "An' what happened then, Sean?"

"A hard man, ma'am." Sean sighed, more for himself than for any defect in the Colonel. "Tells me, he does, that since I was the cause of his trouble perhaps I'll do him the honour of givin' his kitchen the go-by an' be doin' me dinin' in future with those of stouter minds an' bodies."

Sean paused and drew on his pipe. "An'," he finished indignantly, "tells me this, he does, wid the pictures of his Norman ancestors lookin' down their coarse noses at me—an' me wid the blood o' kings of Ireland flowing through me veins!"

"A good tale," said my uncle, with a chuckle, removing his pipe from his mouth. "I must own though, Sean—puttin' meself in the Colonel's place—I'd not relish bein' rid of a cook as fine as the Widder Rafferty."

"Aisy now," said Sean with some heat. "Ye'd think the man could've mustered more patience, me bein' the fellah who'd

led the jig at his weddin' when he brought his darlin' daisy of a bride back to Balconal."

Sean paused and crossed himself sorrowfully. "God rest the sweet cratur's soul, an' her dead within two years givin' birth to the bhoy."

"Ah, the poor man." My aunt lifted her head from her lap where she had been probing a pair of my stockings for holes, and fixed Sean with large and mournful eyes. "No wonder he took to the bottle, first his wife an' then the bhoy—enough to turn any man's brain."

"I didn't know the Colonel had a son," I ventured. "What happened to him?"

"'Twas a long time ago, afore ye came here, John," said Sean, scratching the side of his head with the stem of his pipe. "The little fellah was about eight or nine. Always together they were, the Colonel an' his poor motherless child. I'd meet 'em trampin' through the fields or ridin' through the stubble—an' the Colonel givin' a smile then to any ould fellah, so proud he was of the bhoy."

"A—a—ah, the Colonel always liked childer," my aunt breathed sadly.

"He still does, ma'am; he'll blather to the child where he'll pass by the man. But to get back to me story— One day the bhoy was not to be found. The Colonel was away for the day, visitin' friends, an' the bhoy wanders off on his own. Comes nightfall—when the Colonel's gig draws up to his door the housekeeper informs him that the bhoy has not returned. Gathered his men together then, did the Colonel, an' searches for his son through the rest of the night, not returnin' till the fingers of dawn broke through the sky."

"Did they find the Colonel's son, Mister Creggan?"

"Not till three days later," said Sean, shaking his head. "Fished him out of the river, bloated like a leech an' wearin' a windin' sheet of green weed. The doctor found a lump as big as a goose's egg on the back of the bhoy's head—maybe he slipped an' fell, though certain is nobody saw the goin' of the poor little divil. I was there that day an' I sees the Colonel standin' alone on the bank as his groom wades into the water an' then, merciful Mother of God, he picks up that little weed-covered thing an' stalks away with it back to the big house. They buried the bhoy beside his mother, an' soon after the Colonel ups an' away, not to be seen in Balconal for best part of a year."

"That was always a turrible story, Sean." My aunt was dabbing her eyes with the heel of a stocking. "God knows we ought to make allowances for the poor man."

"An' that's the truth, Kate." My uncle's gaze wandered along the mantelshelf, resting at last on the small china clock ticking manfully away to the left of his beer mug. "But look at that now; 'tis way past the bhoy's bedtime."

Up in my bedroom, with the smoke from my lamp clouding the glass, and old Sean's story fermenting like yeast in my head, I remembered something. Something about the river, and two red dogs, and the Colonel's hand turning white at the knuckles.

So that's it, I though, sitting bolt upright in bed, and realising at last why the Colonel had called me Michael when everyone knows that me name is John . . .

With the passing of winter and the quickening of buds as spring invaded the land, Uncle Patrick promised me a trip to the County Fair over in Balconal—and I was not disappointed.

It had been a day to remember. We were returning home in the jaunting car: Uncle Patrick full of the grand animals he'd seen, Aunt Kate cuddling a diploma for the best jarred honey, and me with memories of a bristling, black-haired wrestling fellah who'd pinned his opponent writhing to the canvas floor.

We had passed the big house about a mile back, and were nearing the paddock in which the little mare ran, when my aunt grabbed my arm. "Look," she cried, "did ye see that?"

"What now?" My uncle squinted into the moonlight.

"A horse—up there by the hedge, Pat."

"Sure, 'tis only the mare."

"Outside the hedge, in the lane," insisted my aunt.

"Och, one of Sean's phantoms, maybe," said Uncle Patrick, winking at me.

"No—look, John—" she was appealing to me—"d'ye not see him pushing against the hedge there?"

My uncle reined the pony down to a walk and we peered through the shadows, and there, by the thin patch, we saw him: a big black horse pushing impudently at the hedge while the mare whinnied impatiently from the other side.

"Faith," said my uncle in a voice of awe, "'tis Caesar!"

And then with a thrust the stallion was through, jigging and dancing before the little mare and rending the still moonlight with his arrogant cries.

"The ould divil." Uncle Patrick's eyes were shining like twin stars. "Will ye look at that now?"

But my aunt had taken in the situation with one firm glance.

"Pat," she reminded him with a nod towards me, "'tis time we were home."

"Och," said my uncle with a shrug, "there's nothin' can be done about it now anyway."

But as my uncle urged the pony into a trot, I turned and stared hard over my shoulder, and the last thing I saw before we rounded the bend was Caesar wheeling in front of the chestnut mare: Caesar aggressive, triumphant, and completely male.

I was there during the next year when the mare dropped her foal, and that was the week after the Colonel had presented the prizes at school.

He'd told us then, had the Colonel, that he was off to some foreign place—going, as he put it, on safari, and when I asked Sean what he meant he muttered something about the Colonel wanting some more grinning heads to stick on his walls. It was plain to see that Sean had not yet recovered from the blow of being separated from the Widder Rafferty's cooking.

I rose that day, the day the mare dropped her foal, to find my aunt alone in the kitchen. "Morning, Aunt Kate," I said, kissing her, and catching a whiff of starch and honey and newly-baked bread. "Where's Uncle Pat?"

"In the stable," she said, lifting her gaze and surveying me with a look of mild surprise. "Didn't ye hear the commotion? The mare's about ready to drop her foal."

I raced through the yard to the stables.

"Steady, John," my uncle called from the straw—and then I saw the mare.

She was down on her side, her chest heaving with exertion, and small whorls of steam whirling up from her flanks as the foal pressed her in its eagerness to enter the world.

"Aisy now," my uncle crooned as the mare moaned, rivulets of sweat pouring down her arched neck. "Aisy now."

And when the foal came, he came fast; head, shoulders, legs; all of him slithering out on the yellow straw. For a moment he lay there, exhausted, panting; a creature of perfection, his damp coat glistening dark copper in the thin shafts of the morning sun.

"God save us," exclaimed my uncle, sitting back on his heels, "did ye ever see a more lovely creature in the whole of this world?"

For a minute or two I stood watching the mare and her fine-shouldered son, until, "Away now, John," said my uncle gently.

And then I was running, heading for the kitchen, bursting with news of a foal who, with curiosity shining in his luminous eyes, had wobbled to his feet, buckled at the knees, and then dropped back to his mother's side.

I suppose it was about the end of the year when the Colonel returned to Balconal, and then he'd been advised, on account of

having malaria, to curtail his activities until the coming of spring. True, I did see him once cantering Caesar across the fields, but it was summer before we finally met, and that was by the gate where I'd been watching the colt racing around the paddock.

Although not yet full grown, the colt was already a tall muscular animal with a set of limbs which looked as if they had been carved from dark mahogany. He was mostly like his dam, sweet and gentle when coming to hand; but sometimes he'd a way of laying back his ears and tossing his head in a flash of black temper which reminded me of his sire.

I was gazing at the colt, admiring the proud tilt of his dark russet head, when I heard the voice beside me.

"Nice horse," said the Colonel. "Whose is he?"

"Morning, sir," I replied, turning, shocked at one quick glance by the hollowness of his cheeks and the high bright colour in his eyes. "He belongs to my uncle."

"Bred from the mare?"

I nodded, my chest tight with apprehension, knowing full well what the Colonel's next question was likely to be.

"But not from Brady's stallion," he said, naming the only other blood horse in the district.

"No, sir," I agreed, determined to stand my ground, tensing myself to take the heat of his anger, "not from Brady's stallion."

And then the blood began to mount in his face, ebbing up from his neck and spreading in a puce-coloured stain over his cheek-bones.

"So," he grated, his voice slow and even, "don't I know my own breed? What was it, boy—did your uncle come to an arrangement with one of my grooms?"

"It wasn't like that at all," I flashed, balling up my fists. "Uncle Pat wasn't goin' to breed from the mare till next year, but—"

"I'm listening," he said coldly, his eyes on mine.

And so it was I told him. Told him about the day of the County Fair, and the moonlight, and Caesar wheeling in triumph before the little chestnut mare, and how I'd been there too when the copper-coloured foal had wobbled to his feet and stared at us with his large, luminous eyes. Told him how once, when the colt had been sick, Uncle Patrick had spent the night beside him, cajoling him and soothing him in a voice like warm syrup until, down in the valley, Doherty's old rooster had crowed in the dawn.

"An' 'tis the truth, sir," I said, finishing my tale.

"I see," said the Colonel thoughtfully, the colour beginning to recede from his face. "Caesar got out, did he? Well, I've

known him try it before. It may interest you to know, boy, that he has another two or three progeny growing up the like of your own."

"Yes, sir," I said, dropping my gaze to my boots, aware that, unlike the others, the colt was Caesar's by-the-by son, and the thing not being done properly with the fee to the Colonel and a couple of drinks to the groom. "They'll be gran' animals too, no doubt."

"Naturally."

He stared hard at me for a few seconds, saying at last, "Look, old chap, there's no need to feel bad about it. Let's make it a secret between us—who's to know?"

"He looks like Caesar," I muttered.

"By heaven, he moves like him, too," said the Colonel, shifting his gaze to the colt. "He'll take some holding."

He shot out one large hand. "Come, boy, you'll not hear another word from me about the colt. 'Twas nobody's fault—I'd have us part friends."

And so with a handshake we parted. I did not know then that the Colonel and I were never to meet again, for the next year—me being away at school in Dublin—my uncle wrote me news of the Colonel's death, and when I came home for the holidays there was a new family up at the big house: a cousin, they said, who'd two boys and a girl. But when I trotted the mare past their iron-scrolled gates my heart was heavy for the man who, while generous to a child, could scarce pass the time of day with his neighbours.

Although perhaps now I shouldn't be remembering those days at all, since the people I knew then have all vanished and gone, but for the fact that I was down at the bloodstock sales last week when that great, big, black fellah of a horse had come dancing into the ring . . .

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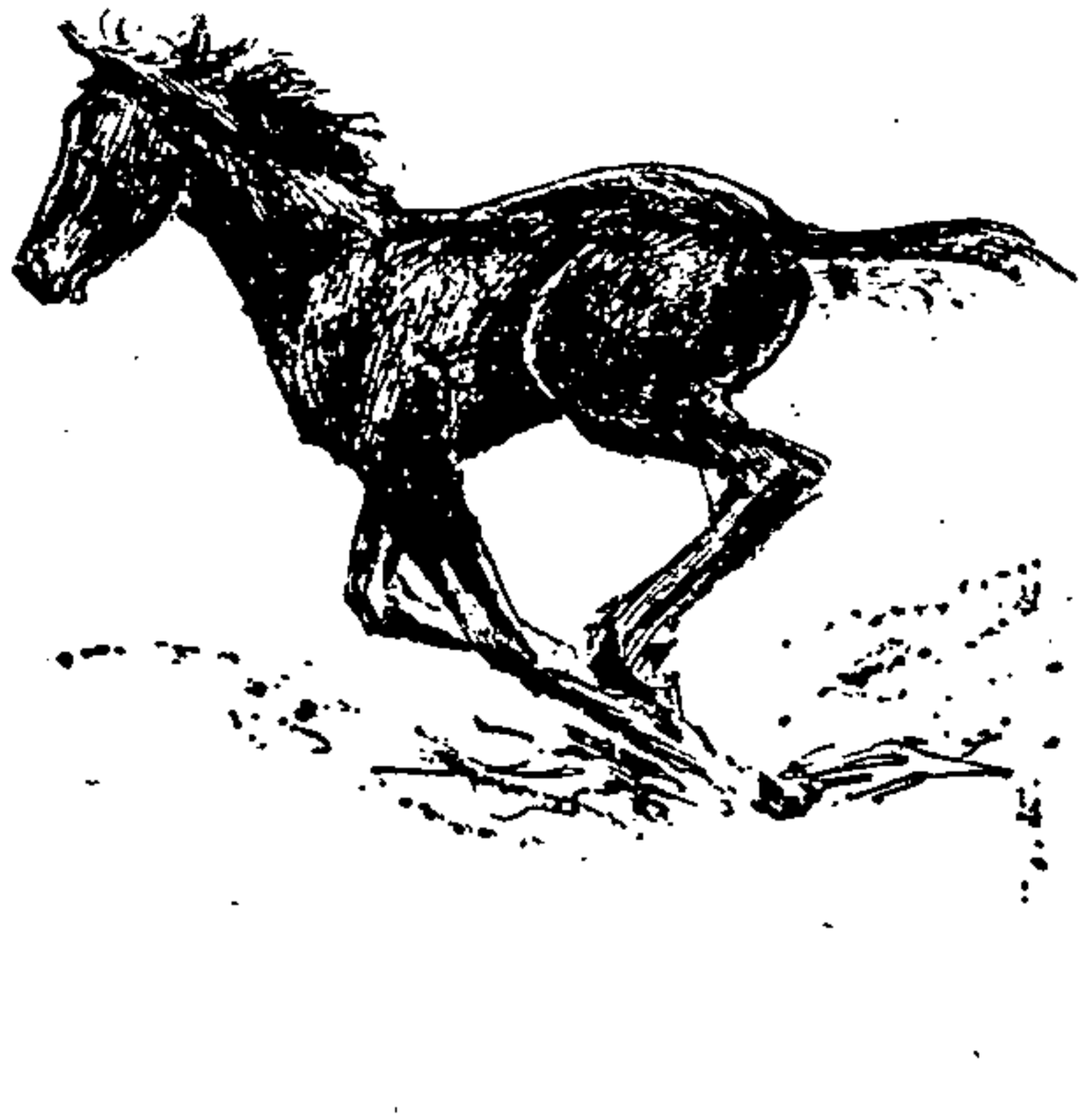

a straight LOOK at

When my love swears that she is made

False though she be to me and love
I'll ne'er pursue revenge,
For still the charmer I approve
Though I deplore her change.

In hours of bliss we oft have met;
They could not always last;
And though the present I regret,
I'm grateful for the past.

WILLIAM CONGREVE

Simple Pleasures

"... But I suppose all Englishmen are hopeless as lovers."

"Not all," I said, "the trouble with most of them is that their minds are not on it, and it happens to require a very great deal of application. Alfred," I told her, "is wonderful."

"Oh, good," she said, but she sounded unconvinced ...

They sat until late looking out of the open window. It was a hot evening, and, when the sun had gone, a green light lingered behind the black bunches of the trees until complete darkness fell.

"Do you always laugh when you make love?" said Fabrice.

"I hadn't thought about it, but I suppose I do. I generally laugh when I'm happy and cry when I'm not, I am a simple character, you know."

NANCY MITFORD, *The Pursuit of Love*

Sing we for love and idleness,
Naught else is worth the having.

Though I have been in many a land,
There is naught else in living.

EZRA POUND

LOVE

of truth—I do believe her, though I know she lies

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Presence of Mind

"But what is it that excites you?" She twisted her head away to look at me. "Is it just the closeness of our bodily contact? Or is it the anticipation of what's to come?"

"Both, I suppose," I said.

"I can feel myself getting excited, too," Nora reported. "Kiss me again. Here." And she indicated a spot on the back of her neck. I did so. "It's fascinating," Nora said. "The actual sensation you feel is quite small . . . There's a mind-body interaction but I can't distinguish them. I can't analyse it."

"Well, stop trying," I said. "For God's sake, relax, and enjoy yourself." That kept her quiet until I pulled a clip on the top of her dress. "Stage two," Nora said. I lifted my head briefly. "I think you should turn your mind off," I said.

SAREL EIMERL, *The Cautious Bachelor*

I can't be talkin' of love, dear,
I can't be talkin' of love.
If there be one thing I can't talk of,
That one thing do be love.

But that's not sayin' that I'm not lovin'—
Still water, you know, runs deep,
And I do be lovin' so deep, dear,
I be lovin' you in my sleep.

But I can't be talkin' of love, dear,
I can't be talkin' of love,
If there be one thing I can't talk of
That one thing do be love.

ESTHER MATHEWS, *Song*

Thanked be fortune, it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once especial—
In thin array: after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown did from her shoulders fall,
And she me caught in her arms long and small,
And therewithal so sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"

SIR THOMAS WYATT, *Vix Puellis Nuper Idoneus*

But what's it all for?

Then something happened which made me change my mind about Jane. For some time she had been leaning her head on Dicky's shoulder . . . But soon Dicky stopped the car and, without saying a word, right there and then in the middle of the deserted road he began necking with her. It was the strangest thing. They went at it like starving cannibals, biting and grabbing and chewing. I never saw such necking. I didn't feel in the least jealous, then, or lonely. In a way, I felt superior. I mean, how insensitive can people be? There was I sitting only a few inches away with a far better view than ever the butler had and they didn't care at all . . .

I began to get bored quickly. There's really nothing quite so tedious as watching other people locked in Passion's Arms. It makes you wonder what it's all for . . .

To pass the time I leant over the back of the car and began to write words on the boot in the dust. Not rude words or anything childish like that, but beautiful ones such as laundry basket, counterbalance, tobacco tin. At least, they seemed beautiful to me.

When the boot was full up with words I got out and started writing them on the wings and bonnet. I wrote garage door, foxglove, blotting-paper, Chiltern Hundreds, drainpipe, and many others.

HENRY ELLISON, *Brother James*

Constancy

Let us have winter loving that the heart
May be in peace and ready to partake
Of the slow pleasure spring would wish to hurry
Or that in summer harshly would awake,
And let us fall apart, O gladly weary,
The white skin shaken like a white snowflake.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS, *Winter Love*

LOVE KEPT WAITING

The mysterious challenge in his eye became unmistakable

BY RHYS DAVIES

A WHEATEN-HAIRED young man, short and tautly sturdy of physique, banged the doorknocker of a terrace house in the old riverside port of prospering Cleddau early that evening. He was calling on Menna, his young lady, and the spring evening was a benign one. Yet, during the long delay before his peremptory banging was answered, he turned and scowled at the sprightly primulas and gillyflowers in the patch of front garden. His nose twitching rather emotionally and the gleam in his provoked blue eye less surly than compulsively indignant, he had the look of a man preparing for combat.

He was suffering very much—and had been in this condition for quite a while—from love kept waiting. So far, however, he had done nothing really disgraceful in all his twenty-three years. Appropriately named Gwyn—which is Welsh for "white" or "fair"—and solidly local of stock, he had lived in lodgings since the recent loss of his mother, soon after his father's death. He was not meagre of ambition but at present had got no further than driving a lorry for one of the factories—his made reliable mattresses—which had been built on the Government-sponsored Cleddau Trading Estate many years after the closure of the town's historic coal mines and the subsequent period of bitter poverty. A child during that prolonged blight, by the time he began to shave his strong jaw he belonged entirely to the new order of things in Cleddau, the traditions, lore, and fiery economic strife of coal mining gone for ever. His parents, victims of the nasty period, had not been able to leave him any material legacy; there was nothing except the household furniture which his two brothers, married and settled in England, had taken. So it was only natural that he earnestly desired a home of his own now and, given his temperament, was consumed by an incontinent impatience. He and Menna had been courting, more or less, for about eleven years.

"A little cockerel," Menna's mother had assessed him when he was barely twelve and had carried her hysterical daughter home after fishing her out of the river. "Puffed out in front, and full of himself."

Mrs. Griffiths had seen no reason to change her opinion since. She had always suspected that her darling was pushed into the river by one of Gwyn's troop at his instigation, when they all were playing on the bank. Furthermore, the next day he had stolen from Dr. Bowen's garden a monster sunflower, tied an inscribed luggage-label to its stalk, and left it hanging from the doorknocker. Passion, she decided, had bloomed in him indecently early. Never able to understand why he and Menna should have formed an alliance after the river episode, she considered Gwyn was an error of judgment on her daughter's part which time might rectify. A girl whose diploma shorthand and grammar, in addition to prizes for elocution at school concerts, had made her bound over her Cleddau acquaintances ought to find a higher class of love than Gwyn could offer.

It was typical, though not premeditated on this evening, that he should be kept waiting at the door. Menna, dark-haired and even shorter of stature than Gwyn, opened it in due course. She blinked rapidly, and exclaimed, "*You!*" But her compactly stout body seemed to widen in the doorway, as if obstructingly. "What do you *want*?" she demanded, sulkily on the defensive.

"To come in." Gwyn, giving her what amounted to a rude nudge out of the way, stepped inside.

"Who are you pushing?" Menna cried, bridling.

She had a musically resonant voice, her syllables, prim yet full, somehow roundly in harmony with the announcements of her breasts; if she had been older she could have been taken for a simmering opera singer accustomed to battling for her virtue on the stage. She was altogether a symmetrical little beauty, tight and glowing with health, like a dark plum not yet plucked from the bough. Her only flaw was the childish petulance which often warped those clearly enunciating lips—due, perhaps, to her doting, out-of-date mother. She was the last of a brood of four, and the others were safely out in the world.

This petulance was in evidence as she watched Gwyn's casually bombastic walk through the hallway to the back living-room; he might have been master of the house. She shut the door and sped after him. "I suppose you have heard that Dad and Mam went away this morning!" she said tauntingly, drawing up in the room's doorway.

"Ida Roberts told me in the canteen today." Gwyn threw himself into a chair and lit a cigarette.

"Gossiping! Are you sure she didn't tell you in that public house last night?" Menna remained in the doorway. "Wait till I see Ida!" she added. She was a valued shorthand-typist in the radio valves factory adjoining the one employing Gwyn and, as a low-grade machinist, Ida Roberts.

"Gossiping? Ida only mentioned it to me." Gwyn put his grubby plimsolls upon a cretonne-covered footstool and gave Menna a sidelong, obscurely challenging glance. "She only said your ma told hers in a shop yesterday that your Aunt Winnie was conking out in Merthyr and your dad was getting time off from work to see his sister off to Kingdom Come."

Menna looked at the plimsolls. He would not have made this evening visit in them, or in his loud-checked lumber-jacket and cowboy sort of trousers, if her mother had been there. She knew, too, that these clothes, particularly the trousers, were intentional for another reason.

"Conking out?" she said. "My mother's language, I suppose?"

"People conk out," Gwyn stated. "They conk out . . . and often leave valuables behind them," he added, becoming oddly censorious of tone.

There was a halt during which they seemed to be sizing each other up across a space about to be occupied by a contest. They hadn't seen each other since a furiously disagreeable quarrel over a fortnight before. On that Saturday night he had met her by the Pwll weir to go to a dance in the Welfare Hall, and he was wearing those same riff-raff trousers, bought that day. She was in a new green silk frock, selected to welcome spring, and he refused to return to his lodgings and change into proper clothes. She had flounced home herself.

Really, it hadn't been so much the trousers. Menna had no very intense feelings about such clothes. During their two years of official courtship there had been dozens of other quarrels, and all these stemmed from his nagging urgency and her procrastination, originating in her mother, about the wedding date. When he had returned from his two years of National Service with the South Wales Borderers, in which he became a corporal promisingly soon, she accepted a ring of tiny diamonds from him. Some months later she fixed a wedding date, chose some furniture with him in a shop, then withdrew the date. And she never liked him to visit her at home; she could only accommodate herself to the element of forcefulness in the grown-up Gwyn, and want to be weak, when they were out in the town, often walking beside the turbulent river out of which he had rescued her long before. Still she remained her mother's daughter.

But their doting on each other would have been pleasing enough to Gwyn had not Mrs. Griffiths been a predatory woman as well. Also, she had overcome her husband, a former coal-cutter who had been given work in a confectionery manufacturing factory on the Estate. Tim Griffiths, especially since he could no longer vanish underground and, after years of hewing the best steam coal in Wales, boxed children's toffees, had a habit of chewing the end of a dejected moustache instead of speaking. Gwyn, however, knew where the judicious man's sympathy lay.

Sitting in the Griffiths' fortress now, and blowing out cigarette smoke with exaggerated nonchalance, the mysterious challenge in his eye became unmistakable.

"Your well-off Aunt Winnie's been taken to hospital, hasn't she?" he resumed, in a politely conversational tone that should have made Menna wary.

"That's why Dad and Mam have gone to stay the night in Merthyr," she replied, flatly informative. She had not moved from the doorway, waiting for an explanation of this visit. "There's Aunt Winnie's pair of budgerigars to look after, too," she added at random.

"Budgerigars fetch good prices."

"What has that got to do with it?" Menna demanded, after a pause.

Gwyn looked round the close-packed room in a grimly commenting manner. The loot from several deaths in the Griffiths' extensive family tree had found way into the house; Mrs. Griffiths would always get what she considered her due. In this room alone hung two ancient glass-fronted wall clocks, brass pendulums swinging with the old-fashioned decorum of bygone time; there were graceful early Victorian dining chairs, a rose-wood press, and a whatnot crowded with knick-knacks. But Mrs. Griffiths valued modern things too, and hers was the only house in the terrace boasting an electric washing-machine, bought on hire purchase.

"I've come about the bedroom suite," he suddenly announced. And all at once it was as though the air began to quiver with tumult. Even the pendulums of the sedate clocks seemed to go at a quicker pace.

"What about the bedroom suite?"

"I'll be paying the last instalment on it next Saturday."

"The suite will keep," Menna said, sulky, but herself showing signs of a deeper simmering. "Furniture doesn't eat food. All it needs is wax polish . . . which I give it now and again."

"Keep for *how long*?" Gwyn barked, pouncing on his opportunity. "Seventy quid I've paid for that suite, not counting the

bed mattress that was fifteen cost price at the factory, our best make with cone springs and white horsehair inside it. Twenty-five for the carpet, too!"

Indignation began to pour out at headlong speed. "Eighteen months I've been paying for the stuff, week after week—eighteen months, and I've never set eyes on that suite since it was delivered here, except once . . . never slept a wink on that bed! All because of your mother's greedy ways. *She* wanted to brag to relations and the neighbours of a new bedroom suite in this house—"

"You wish to insult my mother when she's not here to answer you?" Menna flared. "She could buy half a dozen bedroom suites if she wanted to."

"Not if there's someone else to pay for them."

Heaving in the chair, he seemed to have reached to that dangerous condition when the majestic emotion of love turns to nausea and brings a sense of fraudulence.

Menna looked at him. In measured tones, the syllables punctilious, she began, "What a wicked thing to say! No wonder my mother thinks you are not good enough for me—" She blinked. "She says you are not half the man your father was."

Gwyn had become strangely calm. "We never are," he commented. He looked at both the portentously ticking but not synchronised wall-clocks in turn.

"It's because you are content to be a lorry driver employed by a firm," Menna retracted further, clearly more impressed by the calm than the wrath. "Now that there are going to be more factories in Cleddau, she thinks that before we marry you ought to have at least one lorry of your own and take contracts, like Emlyn Evans has done."

"It's what I intend, given time—*and*," Gwyn added, stern censoriousness returning, "the comfort of my own bed."

Menna, obstinate blindness taking her further into the trap, pursued, "She wants you to be a boss."

The "boss" was scarcely out of her mouth when Gwyn sprang from the chair. "How many people have slept in that bed?" he shouted. "All those relations from Dinas and Llanelly and Caerphilly who visit here?"

Such was the outraged anger blazing from him that Menna backed into the hallway as he strode towards her, voice going higher. "In *my* bed!" And he began to mount the staircase, his feet thumping imperially on the wine-red carpet which was one of Mrs. Griffiths' prides.

Menna's dumb mouth hung open. For a non-resident who was not a doctor or a midwife to go uninvited upstairs was a

gross impudence. Gwyn, after the delivery of the furniture, had been allowed a formal glimpse of the assembled purchases when his supposed future mother-in-law was out, and that had been his only trip to the upper region.

"Come down, you ruffian!" she cried, recovering from the shock. She ran up the stairs.

Of the three upstairs rooms, the back one had been chosen for the furniture. By virtue of eighteen months of occupancy, it had a belonging look there now. It was no longer shop-new, though the double bed, except perhaps to an enraged eye, seemed virginally fresh still, its eiderdown shiny and the twin pillows encased in starched linen, pleats showing. As Menna appeared in the doorway the intruder was pulling open a drawer of the walnut dressing-table. He flung garments out of it on to the Turkey carpet. A pink flannelette nightdress, which could not have belonged to any self-respecting girl of today, especially roused his ire; he held it up, gave a contemptuous grunt, and hurled it into the window-bay. A blouse and a rolled-up corset followed.

"Leave those things alone!" Menna exclaimed shrilly.

"People using this room—" he growled, opening the second drawer. Several pairs of stockings were flung from the desecrated piece of furniture.

Had he gone off his head? Pugnacity swept her momentary dread away. She bounded over to him, clutched the waistband of his lumber-jacket, and pulled him backwards.

He whirled round, lifted her at the hips, and threw her on the bed. "Who's slept in this bed?" he roared, bending over her.

She scrambled on to her knees. "Who d'you think's slept in it?" Measured enunciation had gone. "The Queen of England? Get out of here," she spat, "you hooligan—you pig."

"*Who's* slept in it? Those damned relations of yours, or who? *She's* slept in it?"

"No one's slept in it! My mother only keeps her things in the drawers and wardrobe. You've been drinking! I'll call the neighbours—" Of course, that was the last thing she would do.

"Yes, I've been drinking. So what?" He pointed at her left hand. "Where's your engagement ring? *She's* wearing it in Merthyr?"

"I've been doing washing in the scullery—" Her right hand darted up and slapped him resoundingly on the cheek.

Gwyn, tending to idealism in many things, stood for a moment as if too startled to assimilate the reality of that emphatic blow. No woman had slapped him since his bare-bottom days; besides, *his* mother had been everything she should be.

Another slap brought him out of immobility. He braced himself, his eyes squinting, his nose wrinkling. "Hit me, would you?" he said clearly, gripped her at the waist, and lifted her. At once she closed into a tight rotundity, knees to her chin.

He tossed her into the air. Arrived down, she bounced like a ball from the high-priced mattress. With an athlete's tenacious absorption in the task on hand, he caught her accurately, and threw her higher. She came down with a look of extreme astonishment, and the mattress gave a wheeze as of protest. In the third ascent her head almost touched the ceiling. But in her descent she was able to grip a fistful of his fashionably long hair. He squealed in pain as, her hand twisting, he fell across the wobbling bed. She squirmed on to her knees and pounded her fists on his neck and shoulders. Abusive words, their use more suitable in a man, shot from her.

Gwyn straightened himself and put a knee on the bed; her head dexterously butted him under the chin, and there was the *snap* of clicking teeth. A growl, deep with preparatory warning, had just come from his chest when the knocker of the front door was tapped.

It was a reasonable, almost hesitant tapping, with no suggestion of urgency in it; a family friend, or perhaps the chapel minister, might have been calling. Nevertheless, both Gwyn and Menna were arrested into frozen stillness for an instant.

She was the first to speak. "Who's that?" she breathed. Her face, despite its hectic flush, looked pinched in dismay.

Gwyn's pantings stopped, and, suddenly calm again, he hesitated for only a second, his lips pursed. "Who do you think it is?" he said then. "The angel Gabriel?" He strode out.

Menna scrambled from the bed and ran to the dressing-table mirror. She did not stop there. She sped back to the bed, smoothed out the tumbled eiderdown, whimpered, hurried to the landing, and peered over the banister. Gwyn was opening the front door!

"Hello, Gabby," he greeted the caller. "Dead on time, then! Come in, boy."

They mounted the stairs without delay. Menna backed, slowly, to a corner of the room beside the wardrobe. Bashful and polite, this fellow called Gabby nodded to her when he came in behind Gwyn, his clothes and smudged face suggesting a young man still at work. She gazed at him with the dilated eyes of someone whose senses are in bondage. That he had entered the room was a brazen offence which could not be dealt with yet.

"The bed first," Gwyn said.

The two might have been on a job which was familiar to them every day. No doubt because the other's hands were very grimy, Gwyn stripped the bed of its coverings himself, folding sheets and blankets with careful efficiency. This scruple seemed a delicacy both in keeping with the severe austerity in his face and at variance with the drastic act that, plainly, he was about to perform. He did not glance once at Menna. He was a stranger, as any lover is an unknown quantity at times.

She left the room when he and Gabby lifted the luxurious box-mattress from the bedstead. She moved with the sluggishness of a person bewildered by profound thoughts that could not be sorted out; like a sleepwalker, she wandered into the front room and drew up behind a window curtain. A little sigh came from her. She saw the mattress going into a van drawn up at the kerb.

About half an hour passed before she moved again. Women neighbours, summoned by telepathy, came out of their houses up and down the terrace while bedstead, dressing-table, wardrobe, and two chairs went into the van. It was surprising how many decided to water their front gardens in the fading light of that pleasant spring evening. Spouted can poised, one or two openly stared, and when, finally, Gabby heaved a roll of carpet from his shoulder and shut the van's doors with a bang, everyone ceased watering. Menna herself, the embargo on her faculties lifted, sprang out to the landing just as Gwyn reached the bottom stair.

"Coward!" she shouted over the banister. "Why didn't you try to do it when my mother was here? Coward, coward."

There was no reply. He left the front door wide open. She heard the van's engine start up. Its throb dwindled away. She turned and, standing on the threshold of the back room, placed her hands over her middle as though a cramp gripped her stomach.

How empty the room looked! Empty, desolate, abandoned. Coats taken from the wardrobe lay folded neatly by a wall, though Gwyn had not stopped to gather those things he had hurled with such fury into the window-bay. On the bare floorboards was a pile of blankets, sheets, and the folded eiderdown—items bought by the bride-to-be, as was traditional.

The two pillows and the bolster were gone. They must have been in the wardrobe when it was borne out. Realising this, Menna darted over to the pile on the floor. But the two frilled pillowcases of fine linen, which had cost her a guinea, were folded between the two blankets. A man concentrated on strict justice, Gwyn had remembered exactly the things they had

chosen together in Powell's shop, and for payment of which he alone was responsible under the hire purchase agreement.

Her legs began to buckle. She shivered. She herself might have been stripped and left exposed in the gaunt room. The silence of the house was of an unknown kind. Her mother's protective overseership had been abolished at one stroke. She buried her face in the pillowcase still in her hand. Yet no tears came. Something else welled up inside her. Her legs stopped buckling. But she sat down on the pile of soft goods. And there she remained for quite a while, flowering into something like maturity at last.

Dusk had come when she went downstairs. It was half past eight, her usual suppertime. Mechanically, but with the acceleration of a person whose hollow inside proclaims a need for sustenance, she prepared the table; she liked her food. There was homemade brawn left by her mother; she opened a jar of chutney and cut slices of bread. Yet when she sat down she couldn't eat. Not a crumb. It was as if her stomach would never get into working order again until another insistent urge was obeyed. She slipped on a coat, snatched up her handbag, and left the house.

No gossiping neighbours lingered at their gates by then, so the agony of answering an inquisitive greeting was spared her. Her quick gait had a canine rhythm. Instinct told her where to go. She crossed the Pwll bridge, and in twenty minutes reached the area of council-subsidised houses which they were developing below the Trading Estate.

Gwyn's name was down on the Socialist council's long waiting list for a house here, but he stood a better chance if he was married and had at least one baby. He lodged in one of the fancy-named avenues, Prince Llewellyn's Drive, and Menna went past its entrance with an extra spurt. The district, in addition to a few glossy shops and the Welfare Hall, had its own pub, built recently, and it was to this popular mock-Tudor edifice, set within a deserted courtyard of potted evergreens and rustic benches, that her feet trotted.

The Windsor Castle was quite unlike the old town's semi-private miners' pubs of roaring days that were no more. Ladies, provided their aspect and behaviour earned the description, were welcomed; there was a music licence; snacks and iced cocktails were obtainable; conversation under the chandeliers and tubbed palms was kept reasonably purged, and physical assault was extremely rare. On the way to a dance Menna had consented to enter it once with Gwyn, for a lemon squash; she was no drinker. She whisked unlaggingly into the main saloon now, and drew up

at the crowded horseshoe bar with the over-blank look of a woman who has absorbed everything in a room and seen nothing. She asked for a glass of port.

"A larger one, please," she said, after Tolly Edwards had poured the measure.

Tolly, who did not really approve of young women coming in alone, looked at her. Like most pub licensees, he could instantly scent out troublemakers from peaceable drinkers. "It'll be five shillings, miss!" he said, warningly offensive as he brought a bigger wineglass.

"Cheap enough," Menna remarked. "Is it your best?"

From a purple-illuminated cabinet near the door, a husky female voice howled with mournful desperation for something or other. Gwyn stood among the knot of young men blissfully listening there, pint mugs of beer in hand. He had not noticed her yet. Nearly all the chairs round the scattered low tables were occupied, and every lady had a man with her. Ida Roberts, an habitué, sat with a middle-aged woman and man under the tall centre palm. Her twenties would not last much longer, and her white sweater was tightly strained. Despite the garishness of her cosmetics, especially the green and black about her restless eyes, she belonged, as Menna was aware, not only to a spiritualist church where she was known to go into a trance on Wednesday evenings, but to the Savings Group in her factory. She had induced Gwyn to buy savings stamps every week.

The howling stopped. Crossing the saloon to reach a vacant table against the far wall, Menna passed unseeingly near Ida, who, equally disregarding, began an animated conversation with her companions. Gwyn, as his young lady settled into a puce wicker chair, laid his half-full mug on the table beside her glass of port. He pulled out a chair, and sat opposite her, his back to the room. He showed no surprise at her arrival.

"You came out for a walk, then?" he said, approvingly. This sociable tact blended nicely with his touch of deference; she might have been an acquaintance to whom he wished to pay amicable respects, if encouraged.

"I see Ida Roberts is sitting over there," Menna observed, sounding equally well disposed. "Why doesn't she get off her tail and scamper up that palm tree to take a better look at us?"

Gwyn tittered uncertainly. "Ida means no harm," he said.

"Doesn't she?" Contempt for such male simplicity came into the tone. "She's after that bedroom suite. With you in the bed."

His guffaw was fidgety. "With me in the bed? What, *me*? Ha, ha." Great witticisms might have been exchanged.

Menna looked speculatively at her untouched glass of port. "I couldn't stay in," she said. "I couldn't eat any supper." Her syllables were less precise. A rumble came from her empty inside.

"Drink your wine," Gwyn urged uneasily, as if he had heard a distant roll of menacing thunder. "It will be good for you."

She shook her head. "Why did you do it, Gwyn? In front of the neighbours—"

"Ah, to hell with *them*—" he began, relieved that she had broached the matter.

"You forgot to ask for your ring back." She pulled it from the finger and tossed it over the table. Whether by design or not, it fell into the mug of dark beer.

His neck lunged out and flushed. "It sank!" he said stupidly, unable to deal with this. He gave a quick glance all round the saloon, but nobody seemed aware of the little *plop* made by the ring. Ida was talking to her friends. A man's negroid wail. muscleless as velvet, came from the juke-box.

"What have you done with the bedroom suite?"

"Taken it to my lodgings," he mumbled, and pulled himself together. "Mrs. Vaughan cleared the front room downstairs ready for it. Carpet is down and everything in position . . . I came in here just before you, needing a drink." He scowled at the mug. "Mrs. Vaughan made the bed up—she's got plenty of sheets and blankets." His landlady, a respectable widow, was fond of him and allowed him many privileges.

"You're going to move down to that room, then?" Menna asked, craning to look beyond him, across the saloon.

"Don't know. Mrs. Vaughan said the furniture could be stored there for as long as I wanted."

"You must have been busy. No wonder you wanted a drink." Resolutely closing that particular matter, she said, "I'm trying to catch Ida Roberts' eye. I'm going to call her over to have this glass of port—" she paused and, calm and implacable, added, "in her face."

Gwyn ducked his head; she might already have hurled the glass. A sickly pallor came to his weather-roughened skin. "Now, Menna—" He stared at her as if she were a total stranger.

Opposite him sat a woman icy with scorn of Tolly Edwards and his chandeliers, palms, carpets, and licence for cat music. She had become the daughter of her father as he was in his heyday.

"Savings stamps!" she said. "The sly bitch."

"Menna!" he begged. All a man's helpless abhorrence of battling women lay in his panic. A fight between them was far more shocking than one between men. Thoroughly oblivious to

disgrace brought on those who held them precious, they shattered every principle of combat, biting, kicking, clawing at each other's hair; or else, if they sacrificed such assault, their tongues could cause shudders in men. "Menna," he pleaded, squirming in his chair, "a lot of people know me here. It will be all over the factories tomorrow—"

"A lot of the neighbours saw the furniture go out." Her eyes, flickering over his face as they went in Ida's direction again, seemed to scoop up his dread and tuck it away for future consideration.

"Why don't you run home to bed?" he said almost kindly.

"I'll just throw the port at her on my way out—quietly," she promised, apparently mollified. "Now, go home." She was a little ball of self-reliant womanhood, still familiarly round and tight, but needing to be known all over again.

"Listen, Menna—" he began and, with a rapid movement, took up the glass of port and drained it.

"That settles nothing. I can get another." She reached for her handbag.

"Menna, I swear before God and all the holy angels that Ida won't get that bedroom suite." The panic lessening, something like respect had come into his voice.

"I want a large port," she said, fumbling in her handbag.

He jumped up and went to the bar. He returned carrying a tray. On it, beside the port and another mug of beer, were plates, knives and forks, and a round pie which was of a golden-crusted size that couldn't be called humble. Arranging the meal on the table, he said solicitously, "You didn't have any supper? I didn't either. Veal-and-ham pies in the Windsor Castle are top of their class."

He cut the pie in half and laid her piece before her. In his face, as he waited for her to take a forkful before beginning himself, was a fastidiousness which did not doubt the existence of kindred qualities in a woman associated with him. "Look," he coaxed, "we've both got half of the egg they put inside; come on, eat up."

"I want my bedroom suite," she said, looking from him to the pie.

"It's safe where it is with me, Menna," he said, earnestly. "Nobody else will sleep in that bed."

"Get your friend's van and bring the suite back tonight." Her gaze moved, slowly, from the pie to the glass of port.

The tremendous moment had come. Gwyn's nose wrinkled and twitched from renewed stress. He seemed to be plunging far down in himself for guidance. He found it, and shook his head.

"I mustn't do that, Menna," he said. The severe austerity he had shown in the bedroom was back. He took up the mug which contained the ring. "Mrs. Vaughan told me, 'You could marry and live here with your wife until you get a house of your own.'"

He drank, and the ring slid to his lips. "Pretty!" he said, admiring the hoop of rinsed diamonds in his fingers before laying it near her plate. "Come and see the suite in its new home after we've eaten this pie?" he suggested, inbred delicacy still there. "Mrs. Vaughan will be upstairs in bed and we can sit by the electric fire under the mantelpiece and talk in peace."

Her own moment of choice had arrived. She looked at the face that over the years she had seen lose the moony dottiness it had when he used to loiter at her front gate, waiting for her to appear. Calm decision was there now, giving it prestige. The beautiful passion he had revealed when he hurled her mother's nightdress and corset from the drawer was in abeyance. Another rumble came from her inside, plaintive but urgent. Her eyelids drooped. There was a long pause.

At last she remarked, even with compassion, "That woman sitting over there would be bad for you, Gwyn. You don't deserve her kind." She slipped the ring on, took up her knife and fork, and they ate their pie together with such dispatch that anyone would have thought they were on the gallop to an appointment of the utmost importance.

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"Who crossed off everything over a guinea?"

The Truth about Latimer

Vivid Italian story by
the brilliant author of
The Devil's Advocate

THE truth about Latimer is very simple. He was a calculating egoist, cold as a fish.

The men who were flattered by him will reject my verdict, because it damages their self-esteem.

The women who loved him will want my head because I destroy their illusions. They dare not admit that their golden lover had clay feet and a pinchbeck heart.

He had charm without conscience. He had intelligence but no morals. He had a rare talent, but no respect for it. His creed was simple and terrifying: the world and all the creatures thereof were made for the sole use and benefit of Hugh Monroe Latimer.

He had a handsome contract with Campbell-Fines, who publishes all my magazine material and some of his most spectacular work had been done as illustration for my European series. I was, therefore, useful to him and he was at pains to cultivate my acquaintance. As it was based on business, the acquaintance lasted a long time and even achieved a certain resemblance to friendship.

I had gone down to the Sorrentine Peninsula to prepare a series of colour pieces on the small fishing communities that nestle in antique isolation under the lee of the black tufa cliffs from Meta right round to Amalfi and Positano.

They are an odd people, remote, colourful, secretive, almost untouched by the centuries. They are the lineal descendants of the Barbary corsairs who raided these coasts in the old days, took the beachheads and colonised them, while their captains sailed northwards as far as Civitavecchia and Piombino and into the Gulf of Genoa.

They are small and wiry, with the dark, narrow faces of Berber Arabs. They have adopted the dialect of the Peninsula, but they have added to it old words and phrases from Arabic and Phoenician and colonial Greek. They are shy and secretive and the townsfolk on the cliffs call them "*i barbari*," the barbarians. Until very recently, they married only among themselves, and centuries of inbreeding have produced some curious biological specimens. Now one begins to see Teuton towheads

by MORRIS L. WEST

and cockney faces among the brown children romping among the beached boats and the brown nets along the beaches.

When I sent my first story outlines back to Campbell-Fines, he was enthusiastic about them and sent Latimer out to do a series of illustrations in that dashing, sunlit style of his.

I was pleased to have him. His partnership was a guarantee of success.

I met him at Sorrento and took him out to live with me in a small and primitive pensione right on the beach at Massa Lubrense.

The first sight of the location charmed him. The track wound downwards through dark olive groves and ended at a Greek archway, beyond which a flight of ancient steps scrambled down to the village—a pile of stucco buildings backed against the cliff and looking out between two capes, towards Capri and the misty shapes of Procida and Ischia.

Our rooms were two connecting chambers opening on to a balcony of rusted ironwork. In the daytime they were drenched with sun, and at night they looked out across the moonlit water to the clustered lamps of the fishing boats and the flaring beacons of the gas plants near Naples.

Latimer unpacked his gear, changed into shorts and espadrilles and walked out to join me on the balcony. His well-kept body gleamed with health and his face was lit with that deceptive smile. His deep voice boomed across the beach.

"Man, but this is wonderful! The pictures we'll make! We'll put sun in 'em to sear the eyeballs out! The faces—look at 'em! Enough to fill a dozen sketchbooks! And the girls! Brown skin, flashing teeth—and figures like Venus herself! Man oh man!"

His enthusiasm excited me, too. I grinned at him and warned him lightly. "Watch out for the girls, Latimer. This isn't Capri or Sorrento. This is six centuries behind. They think differently."

He laughed happily and changed the subject adroitly.

"This will be the big one! Exhibition stuff! The shoreline, the beach with boats and the nets, compositions of the village—even some undersea stuff—you know, twilight water and waving seaweeds and the strange bright fish. I've brought an aqualung and half a dozen bottles. Then we'll do some general pieces—interiors, character studies . . . a few of the antiquities. How have you got your story line set?"

I warmed to him then, as I always did. In this at least he was sincere—in his quick perception of the form and atmosphere of a location. This much I could admire—his casual brilliance of

In 1953 Morris West—a humorous six-foot Australian—spent a year in Naples; the result was Children of the Sun, an impassioned protest against conditions in the Naples slums. Then came The Devil's Advocate, winner of the 1959 James Tait Black Prize. Part hermit, part adventurer, Morris West has a deep need for solitude, loves wandering and just looking at things, or—the adventurous side uppermost—whisking his family off for a pickmeup to Japan, Austria, New Guinea, Italy . . .

execution, his uncanny skill at seizing the core of a story and translating it into line and colour and mass.

I began to tell him about my story plan: the simplicity of the lives of the people and the complex pattern of their beliefs and customs; the slow grafting of new cultures on to the old; the harsh labour of their lives compared with the bright and brittle tourist circus which came and went away, and left them, puzzled and alone, in their crumbling village between the forest and the sea.

Then Mamma Angela came puffing up the stairs to tell us that food was waiting for us on the terrace.

When we went down, the whole family was lined up to offer my guest the courtesy of the first wine. There was old Pietro, the father, with the weathered face and the wise eyes of the fisherman. There were the sons, Giuseppe and Nino, brown, barrel-chested, with sleeked hair and the sidelong appraising smiles of the secret people. There was Mamma Angela, bursting out of her Sunday dress, and, a little apart, bright as a bird, in a cotton skirt and embroidered blouse, stood the youngest of the family, the girl, Gioiella.

She was perhaps eighteen. She had the shy, selfconscious grace of a wild creature. She scuffed her bare feet on the stones and fluttered her hands and looked away when Latimer made an extravagant compliment in his deep, honeyed voice. He spoke good Italian and the whole family grinned with pleasure at his theatrical praise of their hospitality and of their house and the dark beauty of their women.

Then Mamma Angela bustled the menfolk into the kitchen while she and Gioiella served our meal—an ample bowl of pasta, frutta di mare, fresh grapes, new cheese, and a flagon of the raw purple wine that fizzed and bubbled on our civilised tongues.

As the food warmed him and the wine relaxed him, Latimer grew more expansive and more eloquent. He enthused over my story and added his own suggestions, full of good sense and canny dramatics. But all the time his eyes followed the compact, lissom figure of the girl as she bustled back and forth to the

kitchen, or stood leaning back against the balustrade, instant to the service of this new and exciting blond one with the fine body and the bold, practised stare.

It was my first warning, but I paid little attention to it. The sun was drowsy and the wine was new. Who was I to deny a friend his first delights in the raw and heady beauty of the south? Tomorrow would be time enough . . . Tomorrow . . .

The pattern of our days was soon set.

We would rise early and breakfast on coffee and rolls and fresh fruit. I would go out on to the terrace and work over my notes while Latimer would wander round the village or along the beach with his sketch block, until the growing heat called us out on to the beach. We swam and sunbathed and compared notes until lunch, when Gioiella would serve us under the sailcloth awning on the white terrace.

Then I would doze a while as the Italians did, while Latimer, restless and energetic, would have old Pietro row him out to the deep water beyond the mole for an hour's diving with the lung-pack down among the sea grasses and the ribs of an ancient wreck, watching the red fish and the silver ones and all the rioting life of the Mediterranean shelf.

When he came back, glowing and exuberant, he would work on his canvases while I tapped the typewriter and Gioiella stood by in wide-mouthed admiration of the god whose fingertips commanded so much beauty.

Latimer treated her, at first, with amused tolerance. He talked to her about his work. He embroidered fairytales about his own exotic experiences and the life in other lands. He teased her as a benevolent uncle might tease a leggy schoolgirl. If he touched her at all, it was to pinch her cheeks or chuck her under the chin and send her bustling about the household business. He was too absorbed in his own work to see the passion in her dark eyes or sense the frank desire in her lithe brown body.

Then, I began to notice a change.

Our work was almost done. My first draft was finished and I was working on emendations and marginal additions. Latimer's folios were full of sketches and finished pieces and he was working only on two major canvases. We were conscious of boredom, of the vague prickly restlessness induced by good health, good food, and the day-long languid sunlight.

The nearer we came to the end of our story, the less interest we had in one another's company. Mealtime conversation flagged. We baked and swam at different times and on different parts of the beach. Latimer's lung-diving trips became more and more frequent, and in the afternoons he spent more and more

of his time with Gioiella, working at his easel by the open balcony door, or wandering the rocks and beaches beyond the eastern point and out of view of the village. When you saw them together, you could not mistake her passion for him. You could not miss his ironic enjoyment of it.

He was painting her, he told me—and I, like a fool, drugged with sun, let it pass without comment.

Then one day old Pietro came to me.

I was sitting on the beach, propped against the planks of his boat, working over the last section of my story, when his shadow fell across the page.

I looked up. Pietro doffed his cap with deference and begged the favour of a few words with the signore. I grinned and told him he could have as many as he liked. When I stood up and faced him, I saw that his old eyes were troubled and that his gnarled hands fidgeted uneasily with his cap.

"Cosa è? What's the trouble, Pietro?"

"Signore . . ." He hesitated a moment, then the words came out in a swift rush of dialect. "Signore, you will not misunderstand an old man. You will forgive the anxiety of a father . . ."

"Yes, Pietro?" I stiffened, afraid of what he might say next.

"This friend of yours, the Signore Latimer—is he—is he a good man?"

"I don't understand you, Pietro."

He faced me squarely then; his eyes were hard and the lines on his brown face were deep with painful wisdom.

"I think you do, signore. This Latimer is much in the company of my daughter. This I do not approve, since he does not belong here and there is no hope of marriage between them. But I have been a sailor. I have travelled. I understand that in other places women may have company with men without damage to their honour. Provided—provided the man is a good man who respects the virtue of a good woman. So, I ask you again, is this friend of yours such a one?"

I did not hesitate. How dared I? I told him that Latimer was a good man and honourable. I pointed out that he, being ignorant of the customs of the coast, would see no danger of scandal in his actions. I begged Pietro's pardon for the anxiety my friend had caused him. I promised that I would speak quietly and discreetly with him as soon as the opportunity offered itself.

The old man's face brightened. He took my hand, raised it to his lips.

"You are a good man, signore, a true friend. I shall pray for you to the Madonna. We shall all pray for you."

Then he released my hand and walked away, light of step and of heart, and I knew myself for liar and cheat. I knew, too, that I must get Latimer out of the village before it was too late.

That same evening I went to his room, I knocked. He asked me to wait a moment. Then he opened the door and let me in. His face was covered with shaving soap and he held a razor in his hands. He was alone. The easel stood in its usual position beside the balcony doors, but the canvas on it was reversed so that the picture was hidden.

Latimer grinned and told me to sit down while he finished shaving. I refused. I told him I had something to say and I wanted him to hear it immediately.

He put down the razor, turned to face me, and began slowly wiping the soap from his face. He was smiling, but his eyes were canny and hard.

"Let's have it then!"

His bluntness took me unawares. I fumbled for words. They came stiffly and awkwardly from my lips.

"Look, Latimer, this—this may not seem my business, but it is. You and Gioiella have been spending a lot of time together."

"So?" He was still smiling, and his eyes were lit with malicious amusement.

"So it's causing scandal in the village. It's bad for you and it's worse for the girl. I think you should lay off."

"Scandal!" His head went back and he stood rocking on his feet and roaring with laughter. "Scandal! Where do you think you are? What century do you think this is?"

I was angry then and the anger loosened my tongue. I gave it to him baldly.

"This isn't our country, Latimer. This isn't even our century. This is a place and a time when a girl like Gioiella must be married a virgin or not be married at all. This is a place where a good girl doesn't walk out with a man unless he be her fidanzato. If she does otherwise, she loses her honour! The man involved is liable to lose his life. You've been here long enough to know that these are primitive people—simple, perhaps, but subtle, too. There's a line you don't cross—and you're crossing it now, if you haven't already done it. I'm not joking, Latimer. I'm not telling fairytales. This is serious. For you, for the girl, for me. If you've got any sense, you'll pack up and get out—tomorrow."

The laughter was quenched in him like a candle flame. His eyes clouded, his mouth twisted into a scornful grin.

"I'm working here, remember? That's why I came. That's what I'm paid to do. I'll leave when I'm finished, not before."

"We're finished now, Latimer."

"You may be, but I'm not. I'm working on a picture. It could be the best of the bunch. I'm not prepared to leave it. Look!"

He stepped to the easel and turned the canvas so that it faced me. The impact of the revelation robbed me of speech. The girl in the picture was Gioiella. He had painted her as a classic naiad coming up from the sea to sun her dark naked body on the rocks. She was the embodiment of pagan beauty and vibrant, passionate youth. For the first time in his life, I think, Latimer had come near to making a masterwork. He knew it, too, and was sardonically pleased at my surprise and discomfort. He waited for me to speak.

There was only one thing I could tell him. He had painted a good picture and committed an incredible folly. If any but ourselves set eyes on the picture, the girl's life would be ruined. She would be branded a puttana for having exposed her beauty to a man who was not her husband. Her family would hunt her from the house and she would end up in a backstreet in Naples.

Before I could say a word, the door opened and Mamma Angela came to call us for dinner. The picture was turned towards her. She could not fail to see it, nor understand its significance.

For a long moment she just stood there, saying nothing, while Latimer grinned cheerfully and I goggled at her like a guilty child caught stealing in a pantry. She looked at the picture. She looked at Latimer. She looked at me. She said very softly, "Pronto a tavola, signori. Your dinner is served, gentlemen."

Then she went out quietly, closing the door behind her.

He said calmly, "Do you think she liked it?"

"For heaven's sake, Latimer!"

"Well, did she or didn't she?"

I had no answer to his effrontery. I shrugged and spread my hands in the fashion of the south. "Don't ask me, Latimer. The damage is done now. From here on, it's up to you."

He gestured indifferently and went back to his shaving. Over his shoulder, he told me, coolly, "I'm not going back with you, you know. I like it very much here. I like Gioiella, too. I'm doing good work, as you see. Why should I move?"

"I don't give a damn what you do, Latimer," I told him. "I'm only worried about the girl."

Then I left him and walked down to the terrace, where Mamma Angela was waiting to serve my dinner. Gioiella did not appear.

She didn't appear next morning, either. When I asked where she was, Mamma Angela gave me a blank stare and a vague

gesture and said she had gone to stay with an aunt in the next village.

As for Latimer, his cold, flaunting demon had taken possession of him. He had decided to stay. Nothing would induce him to leave. He would wait till Gioiella came back from her aunt's. I tried to argue with him and he laughed in my face. I gave it up as a bad job.

The next day, Latimer decided he'd like to make another diving expedition over the wreck. He had one air bottle left. He wanted to use it up. Cool as bedamned, he ordered Pietro's boat for the afternoon. The old man shrugged and said that he was at the disposal of the signore. The hostility in his eyes meant nothing to Latimer, neither did the atmosphere of resentment and distrust which now pervaded the village and the little knots of men and boys clustered about the fish traps and the nets.

They meant much to me. I wanted to go away, but to do so was to involve myself in Latimer's guilt, and this I was not prepared to do. Old Pietro might be disappointed that I had lied to him, but he knew and understood that I had no part in the affair of Latimer and Gioiella. So I decided to sit it out—and wait.

About two in the afternoon, I saw Latimer walk down the beach, carrying his diving harness. I thought how handsome he was and how easily his practised charm must have conquered the primitive, passionate Gioiella. What puzzled me was Pietro's apparent acceptance of the situation. I watched them as they pushed the boat down to the water. I saw them talking together as Pietro sculled out across the flat, shining water towards the diving area. I found myself nodding drowsily in the sun.

Twenty minutes later, I was disturbed by a clatter of voices and a scurry of movement along the beach. I sat up and rubbed my eyes. The whole village was astir. They were preparing the nets and pushing their boats down to the water as if going out fishing. I leaned over the balcony and called to Giuseppe.

"What's going on, Peppi?"

He looked up and grinned and pointed out across the water.

"A big catch! The tunny fish are running. A whole shoal of them."

Before I had time to question him further, he had turned away and was racing down the beach to help with the boats.

For a long time I stood there, watching them, busy as ants about their age-old ritual. I saw them push out, one by one, rowing in line ahead past the tip of the mole. Then they came abreast of each other and pulled steadily towards the deep water

where Pietro's boat bobbed lazily and Hugh Latimer was diving in the sea pastures among the red and silver fish.

Then the glare began to hurt my eyes, my lunch began to make me heavy again, and I went upstairs to take my siesta.

It was Giuseppe who woke me, shaking my shoulders, babbling in dialect, "Signore, signore! For the love of God, come quickly! Your friend—a terrible thing! Quickly! You must see!"

Leaping from the bed, I raced down the rickety stairs and to the beach.

The fishermen had come back. Their boats were drawn up on the strand and the whole village—men, women, and children—was gathered in a compact mass at the water's edge. They were silent and blank-faced. They turned to watch me approach, and when I came to them they drew apart and made a little lane for me down to the water's edge.

What I saw stopped me in my tracks, paralysed with horror.

Pietro and his sons were holding a big brown net. Huddled inside it, masked and flippered and looking like a pale sea monster, was the body of Hugh Latimer.

"He was diving," said Pietro flatly. "He was diving as he always did. He went down once, twice, and again. The third time he did not come up. We had to leave the tunny fish to trawl for him. It was a long time before we found him."

I looked at him. His eyes were blank. I looked round at the villagers. Their faces were like masks of brownwood.

Then I saw Gioiella. Her eyes were staring with terror. Her face was streaked with tears and swollen with weeping. Mamma Angela's strong hand held tightly to her wrist so that she could neither go forward nor run away.

I bent down to release Latimer from the net. He was cold as a fish.

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SOLUTION TO ARGOSY CROSSWORD

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Across. 1, *Theatres of War.* 9, *Electress.* 10, *Sibyl.* 11, *Aosta.* 12, *Ilex.* 13, *Snow.* 15, *Tigress.* 17, *Sundown.* 18, *Naiveté.* 20, *Blender.* 21, *Glen.* 22, *Bean.* 23, *Tulip.* 26, *Maple.* 27, *Trickster.* 28, *Guitar strings.*

Down. 1, *The waiting game.* 2, *Evens.* 3, *Tetrameter.* 4, *Eyelids.* 5, *Oysters.* 6, *West.* 7, *Robin Hood.* 8, *Glowing reports.* 14, *Undertaker.* 16, *Guinea-pig.* 19, *Electra.* 20, *Bunnies.* 24, *Latin.* 25, *Demi.*

Red Kelly

by ARTHUR MAYSE

WHEN I have a tough one to figure, I pick up a jeep at the company tree farm and head for the old Quelth burn where I swung the loading tongs for Butcher Morgan over twenty years ago. In there, with only grouse and deer and a hawk in the sky for company, I quit being Ransome J. Kelly, a boss logger with a fine home on Gunnery Point and fourteen hundred men on my payroll. The burn takes and squeezes the importance out of me.

By the time I've peglegged along the overgrown railway grades to the Branch Three junction, I'm plain Red Kelly, strong in the back and weak in the head, an orphanage hardnose who except for luck and marrying the boss's granddaughter, would have stayed a tame ape.

This morning I found my caulk-shoes set out, and my yellow hard hat with KELLY lettered on the front, and a pair of old work pants tight in the top and stiff with resin. My dogs were crazy to come, but Labs like Grouch and Marco are too much company for a man with a problem, so I left them in their runway.

Even without their help, I'd filled my limit on blue grouse before the sun was ten o'clock high. I cached the birds and my shotgun a couple of miles in from the junction, and bushwhacked through an alder swamp to the last of the high spurs that used to carry the Morgan Logging Company steel west from Branch Three.

It was warm for October, real Indian summer weather. The sun drilled between my shoulders. A nosebag lunch from the tree farm cookhouse sagged in the back pocket of my coat. I kicked up more grouse, willows that whipped low through the secondgrowth with a clatter of wings, and saw any number of deer, and where the swamp tongues out to the stumps, darn if I didn't meet a cougar nose-on, strolling bold as brass in broad daylight. He was a big fellow, he gave me the eye in a way reminded me of the saucy young pilot my teenage daughter, Maury, wants to marry—a hell-with-you look.

I said to the cat, "I'm Red Kelly, mister, and who d'you think you are?"

He wrinkled his snoot at me and faded out among the stumps. I climbed to the blue-clay waterhole we used to tank up at when I was a kid logger working on that spur, and shed my coat, and set to on my lunch with cold spring water to wash it down.

What I'd told the cougar was strictly true. The burn had gone to work on me as it always does, the Ransome J. Kelly of Kelly & Morgan Timber was off at a board meeting or swatting around

a golf course or laying into the champagne breakfast on a jet to Chicago. I was plain Red Kelly again.

I set myself to study on this business of my daughter and the flyer she wants to marry. Instead, I found myself thinking about that boy I used to be, the staky young second loader who had hunkered by the waterhole on a September day over twenty years ago.

The past kept drifting in on me. Finally I let the past take over and the years peel away, clear back to the time when truck logging was still a pup, and Morgan's was the toughest railway show on the coast, and I was wearing out a pair of rigging gloves a month on the Butcher's highball Side Five crew.

On that particular day in September of '41, if anyone had told me my world was fixing to turn itself upside down, I'd have laughed in his face. All I knew while I dipped water into a bag with a milk tin was that the sun felt good and I liked my job, and life was a big red apple juicy for biting.

I rocked up off my heels and corked the dripping bag. Alongside me, the steel began to sing. When I was halfway to the donkey engine, a company speeder came clickety-clack up the spur. It passed me, grinding against the grade, the big Casey Jones the brass used on inspection trips. In the cab sat old Butcher Morgan himself, the boss logger who got his woods-name away back when the highlead system was new and he killed four rigging men in a week. Beside him was the super, looking even more worried than usual. But the hell with those two!

What caught my eye was a girl riding the rear deck with her arms rested on the cab roof. She was tall, with black, black hair and a skin like cream. The wind pressed her white blouse and belted tan skirt against her. She leaned into that breeze with an eagerness about her, and I guessed she felt as I did: that life was a rosy-red apple to toss in her hand and bite when she was ready.

I gave her a grin and a nod, mooching along with no shirt to my back and wire-rope jagger tears in my pants. She paid me no heed, didn't so much as glance my way. But at the crest of the rise, just as the speeder racketed round the bend, she turned and waved to me.

While the donkey fireman brewed our noon coffee in his boiler, this girl perched herself on a stump across the tracks and set to with a sketch pad and pencil. I watched her. The whole Side Five crew did, pretty girls not being a common sight on a highlead show.

"Who's that one?" I asked Kangaroo Jones, the head loader and my sidekick, supping his coffee beside me.

"Her with the legs?" Kangaroo said, and took a pull at his can. "She's the Butcher's granddaughter, mate, come from Gunnery Point to watch the tame apes at play. Miss Helen Morgan, and not for the likes of you."

"Well," I said to him, "she may be the queen bee of Gunnery Point, but that makes no never-mind to a pitchy stump. Wait'll she tries to rise up."

"Why wait, cobber?" says Kangaroo.

He tossed his coffee can into the slash and swung off the car.

I remember Kangaroo Jones best as he was that minute—smiling so his gold centre tooth showed; a long brown reckless dude with his hat tipped back, and his light-coloured eyes squinted against the sun. He crossed the grade and mounted to where the girl sat sketching.

Whatever he said to her made her shake her hair back and laugh; and while she was still laughing, Kangaroo set his hands round her waist and lifted her from the stump. The Butcher's granddaughter twisted to look at her skirt, then made a funny screwed-tight face.

As I've said, Kangaroo Jones was my best friend. But right then, I could have batted him in his big buck teeth. No sense or reason to it, just the feeling it should have been me lifted that girl to the slash.

Kangaroo jogged back, slapping his gloves against his leg. Over our heads, the donkey whistle screeched an end to our nooning. The chokermen and rigging slinger trotted out to the haulback bight, the chaser pulled on his gloves.

"Stone the crows, Red!" Kangaroo called to me, balanced on a skeleton car beam with the lead tongs dangling from their loading line over his head. "You'd not guess what she's up to."

I didn't answer, but he told me anyhow, taking the eighty-pound tongs on his shoulder, picking his log from the half-dozen sticks ready on the landing. "Making a likeness of you, that's what. You humping along the grade with a waterbag, bluey, ugly as life!"

"Hell with you!" I told him; but he was already running in with the tongs, two hundred pounds on the worn-down caulks he was everlastingly meaning to renew, but light as a dancer.

He slung the tongs off his shoulder with the loader's twist that spreads the jaws and sets the grip. The leverman on the donkey gave her the power, and the snipe of that seven-ton fir log grunted into the air. I balanced the rear tongs as Kangaroo had taught me, and ducked in and made my throw. The loading blocks squealed, the stick lifted and swung, and settled between the car bunks.

"Taken a shine to you, she has," Kangaroo ribbed me, with his gold tooth flashing. "We'll put on a show for your sheila, Red. We'll bloody well smash the camp loading record."

"You crazy?" I said to him. The record stood at a hundred and eleven loads for a working day. "On this sidehilly layout we haven't a chance." Then I looked at Helen Morgan where she stood on the donkey deck, and settled my belt and shook the bark dust from my gloves. "O.K.," I told Kangaroo Jones. "We'll bust her."

We had near sixty loads to go, but we were salty and young, and tough as men can be. In an hour, the engineer was whistling for another string of empties. The sun grew hotter, the bark dust mixed with the sweat on our hides, but we held the pace, Kangaroo and me and the other second loader spelling off, the cars of fir and shaggy-barked red cedar clicking past the landing brow-log like beads on a string.

The boys in the haulback bight had got word of what we were up to. They were highballing too, feeding logs to the landing fast as the engineer could yard them in and the chaser unhook them.

Our other second-loader, a heavyset hoosier by the name of Blondy Arseneol, began hitting the waterbag. Around three o'clock he turned green in the face and staggered into the slash, cursing Kangaroo Jones and me in a voice like a raven's croak. That meant no more spell-offs, but still we kept at it, monkeying from car bunks to brow-log, running in with the tongs, building towards a new record.

Butcher Morgan watched from the clear, with his black felt hat riding level on his white hair and a thin cigar between his teeth. I never once looked at the girl, but I knew she was watching too. I forced the pace, taking chances even beyond what our widowmaking job called for. Kangaroo was my sidekick, but I was out to prove to Helen Morgan and myself that I was the better man. I was drunk on something stronger than rum—I couldn't slip and I couldn't miss.

It was Kangaroo Jones who slipped. He freed his tongs and jumped for the landing, and his blunt-worn caulks skidded on the steel car bunk. He hit the landing in a flat fall, rolled, and was on his knees when the turn of logs coming in from the woods crashed down.

It happened fast—faster than I could yell or the chaser signal a stop. Eric Larson, our engineer, buried his face in his arm for a second. Then he went ahead slow on the mainline drum, and inch by inch that murdering pair of forty-foot butt logs lifted.

I set my hands under Kangaroo's shoulders and drew him clear. From the wet on my face, I knew I was weeping. The donkey whistle was sounding off with the *Man-hurt*; but one look told me there was nothing anyone could do for Kangaroo Jones. Neck to hip, he was crushed and broken.

I held him with my arms under his, and his head against my knee. The girl we'd set out to smash the record for, Butcher Morgan's blackhaired granddaughter, came and knelt beside us with her grey eyes wide in a face like chalk. She had wetted a handkerchief and was dabbing at Kangaroo's forehead. I struck her hand away.

This was the dude who had found me, a sixteen-year-old runaway, dallying around the Loggers' Agency in Vancouver, and bought me my first meal in two days, and got me a spark-chasing job, and made a man and a loader out of me. My partner for five years, dying here on account of her and me.

"Mate," I said to him in the Aussie talk he'd brought from the gumwood stands down under. "Hey, cobber . . ."

He gave me a ghost of his gold-toothed grin.

"Wuruwuru, Red," he whispered from his smashed chest. "I'm away."

And that was all. By the time the first aid man got out from camp, he had pulled the pin.

The girl tried to speak to me, but I turned my back on her. I tramped down to the waterhole and washed the blood from my hands. It wasn't truly that girl's fault, or her grandfather's either. But I hated them both, or told myself so—the Butcher because it was his logs and rigging, and Helen Morgan for being there with her silky long legs and black hair and pretty face to set men baiting the foolkiller.

I tell you, I would have thrown my gloves away, except for a war being on and loggers frozen in their jobs. The coroner's jury brought in a no-blame-attached verdict, with a rider advising men on the rigging to check the state of their caulks.

We buried Kangaroo Jones at Samiston. Next day, on Butcher Morgan's personal order, I was upped to be head loader on Side Five.

That same night, Blondy Arseneol stuck his head in the bunkhouse where I lay staring at the ceiling, remembering good times Kangaroo and I had together, and trying to forget Helen Morgan.

"Phone call for you," Blondy told me. He hadn't liked it, me being put over him as head loader, and twice on the job we'd traded words. "Looks like you got it made," he said. "It's that fancy dish from Gunnery Point."

I knew Blondy and I were due to tangle. But not in camp; loggers would as soon wear work gear to town as fight in camp. I heaved off my bed and shoved past him, and went down to the office.

On the phone, she sounded younger than the nineteen or thereabouts I'd judged her to be. Her voice came to me scared and faraway.

" This is Helen Morgan, Mr. Kelly," she said. I waited, and she went on, quickly, as if not too sure of herself. " I'm giving a small party on Saturday night. If you'd care to come, I'll pick you up at Grandfather's beach camp."

I wanted to tell her what she could do with her small party on her grandpa's Gunnery Point layout. Instead, I heard my voice telling her I'd come, and no need to pick me up.

Saturday night, I hopped a speeder to the beach, where the gravel road north from Samiston ended. I wore my blue town-going suit and tan shoes I'd bought last trip to Vancouver, and a patterned silk shirt that cost me thirty bucks. The steel gang kid who did the camp barbering had cut my hair. I was still torn two ways: I hated that girl, but I had to see her again.

The Side Seven rigging slinger offered me a lift in his car, but Blondy Arseneol was one of the bunch going down with him, and the chances of having my suit spoilt were too good. So I called to Samiston for a taxi and, a shade after nine-thirty, the taximan wheeled us between the Butcher's stone gateposts. There were a lot of cars on the drive. The big house was blazing with lights. Music drifted out to us, and through the windows I could see couples dancing. The fellows looked to be mostly in uniform—officers from the RCAF station and the Navy base along the point.

" You're stepping high, Red," the driver said. He eyed me up and down where I stood digging for my wallet. " This ain't the Frenchman's or the Golden Slipper in town. You oughta' worn black shoes and a white shirt, son, and a tie that don't holler murder."

" Maybe I should be wearing caulks," I told him, and slapped an extra buck into his hand. I settled my shoulders and headed up towards the lights and music with my fighting irons on.

A flunkey let me into a hall that had a stone floor and suits of armour standing on either side. I stood there thinking the dudes who'd worn that tinware must have been real runty, too small to swing the loading tongs. Then I forgot about that, and about Kangaroo Jones and everything else, because Helen Morgan was facing me under the hallway arch. Her hair shone and her dress shimmered like green ice. She wore pearls in her ears and two strands of pearls round her neck. Moving towards

her with my left shoe squeaking, I knew only one thing for certain: no other girl had ever belted me this way.

I've never been able to recollect much about that affair, except for small things like the mouse in my shoe, and looking over Helen's head in a dance to see the Butcher watching us from the stairs, and the way the flunkey's eyebrow lifted when I told him rum was my drink. Helen kept track of me as best she could, and a little sub-lieutenant, a Royal Navy kid out from England, never strayed far from Helen. About midnight, when I was dancing with her again, this boy cut in.

He did it real polite, with a smile and a, "May I, old man?" but I itched to slug him. I took myself off to the side and scooped up a glass, not caring whose it was or what it held. There in the shadows I watched Helen and her Navy officer in his blue uniform, and for the first time in all my life, I saw myself plain.

In St. Vincent's Orphanage and in the woods, I had always thought well of myself. But here among Helen Morgan's friends—those private-school girls and their fellows—I knew I was like a hemlock stick in a load of prime fir. Being big and tough and a crack loader cut no ice on Gunnery Point.

I set my glass down and eased out of the party, lonely for Kangaroo, and wanting to cut loose and bust something. Blondy Arseneol would be having himself a paynight in the Frenchman's or the Golden Slipper. Maybe when I'd hunted out Blondy and tangled with him, I'd feel right again.

Blundering through dim rooms, hunting for a side- or a backdoor, I came to a glassed sundeck with a skylight in its roof. The full moon lit it near as bright as day. It was a workroom, with drawings and painting gear lying around, and books and magazines dropped any old where on chairs and sofa and floor. I made to edge past a table, and my own face looked up at me from white paper. It was the picture Kangaroo had needled me about—me on the spur with the waterbag. I flipped it over, and another sketch lay beneath. The charcoal lines were savage, as if slashed on to the paper. Staring down, I felt pain so sudden-sharp I had to breathe shallow and slow.

A dress rustled behind me. I said to Helen, not turning, "Nice work, lady. This one was kind-of a bonus, eh! He told me you came to watch the tame apes at play. You were lucky, you caught one dying."

She didn't speak. I ached to hurt her. "What'd your baby-face Limey think of this picture, Miss Morgan?" I asked her. "Him with his voice in his nose. He get a kick out of it?"

Helen said, "I sketched that because I had to, Red. It stayed with me day and night. I cried over it."

She reached her hand and turned me. Even in high heels, she seemed smaller than she had, riding the company speeder. She said, looking up at me with the moon on her face, "I asked you because there was no other way to meet you, Red."

"We didn't have to meet," I said.

A lie, and I didn't need those steady eyes of hers to tell me so. I said, "Wake up, will you? We're different, you and me. What would we have, what could we do?"

She moved forward, one step, into my arms. Her head fitted under my jaw as if it belonged there.

"We could make it work," she said in a voice so small I barely caught the words.

Every bunkhouse I ever dropped my suitcase in, there's been at least one bigmouth with a yarn about how some round-heeled rich girl picked him up in her convertible or made a play for him in a bus depot or on a steamer or somewhere. This in the moonlight, in that quiet room, was a logger's dream come true. Or should have been. But what had hit me wasn't a business to be settled so easy. I knew, holding Helen, with my face on her hair, we couldn't ever settle it. We had Gunnery Point and a school in Switzerland and a mint of money between us. Those, and St. Vincent's where they pick a nothing-kid's name for him out of a hat, and the skidroad, and Kangaroo Jones dead in the Morgan Logging Company slash.

"Helen, how old are you?" I asked.

She answered against my throat, "Eighteen. Nearly."

"All right," I told her. "I came to your party. Now, you're going to mine."

I expected her to say she couldn't leave her guests, but she only said, "I'll get a wrap." I waited for her in her workroom, then we slipped out and round to her car. In spite of the bitterness churning inside me, I had to laugh, because that car was a cream convertible from here-to-there long.

"You drive," she said, and handed me the keys.

I got the feel of the car, winding it out to River Road. On the straight, I bore down. We hit eighty, then eighty-five. With the needle crowding ninety, I shot a look at Helen. She was as she had been on the high spur the day Kangaroo died—eager, with a wildness in her, like an apple ready for biting.

I knew what had to be done. "Now listen," I said, talking as I never had to any girl before. "You've taken a fancy to a bundle of muscles because you're just too damn young to know better. Do yourself a favour. Let me take you home."

"I'm not too young," she said, stubborn and soft. "And loggers do marry, Red."

"Some do," I told her. "Maybe I will myself, one day, if a sapling or sidewinder don't catch me first. Only it won't be to any Gunnery Point girl. You belong with a fellow from your own set. Someone like that nice little Navy boy who was tagging you tonight."

"And who happens to be a very brave man," Helen said. She half turned to me in the highballing car, and I felt her pride and the sharp edge of her temper. "He flies a Swordfish torpedo bomber in the Fleet Air Arm. He goes in at low speed against battleships. He's been shot down once, and when he returns to his squadron he will almost certainly be killed."

Her voice struck hard. "I'm not a snob, Red Kelly. But you are, in a twisted, upside-down way." She straightened. Her chin was up; she was close to crying. "Believe me, I'd prefer to be in love with one of those men. It would be so much simpler. But I'm not. Now, let's go on to your party."

The Frenchman's backroom is no place for any nice girl, least of all one from Gunnery Point. But Helen sat there across from me, cool as if she was used to having drunks trip over her feet in a bootlegger's joint, and seeing the Frenchman's bouncer toss guys out, and a woman slobbering around in hysterics with her make-up smeared all over her face.

I gave her a good taste of that trap, then held her fur jacket that cost half a year of a head loader's pay, and took her out to the street. "Do I make my point?" I asked her, glad of the cool breeze on my face.

She only smiled at me the way a mother would at a kid cutting up rough, and said, "Where do we go now?"

The Golden Slipper was out past the edge of Samiston. As I parked Helen's car, two construction stiffs came flying through the open doors and down the steps. They picked themselves up and got on with their battle, nobody paying them any attention. Three fights was average for a dance night. Since Blondy Arseneol hadn't showed at the Frenchman's, he'd be here. That meant one of those fights would be his and mine.

"Now," I said to Helen Morgan, "we go dancing."

My style wasn't the sort they favoured on Gunnery Point, where the couples had oozed around like they were half asleep, but Helen fitted herself into it as if we'd been stepping Saturday nights for a year. I looked down at her, into her flushed face and shining eyes, and darn if she wasn't enjoying herself.

We were into a polka when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I switched my head and saw Blondy Arseneol, curly hair and flat face grinning, and shoulders a picaroon-handle wide under his tight suitcoat.

"This is too nice to keep to yourself," he said to me. "Suppose you pass it around?"

I flagged a friend of Kangaroo's and mine on the sidelines, a hooktender working on North-west Timber. He eased over, and I loosed Helen's hand and gave her a little push towards him. Blondy and me started outside, shedding our coats on the way.

I'd like to claim I licked the bejudas out of Blondy Arseneol but, not to make a long business of it, he whipped me. I put him down twice, and he rose up each time happy as a raven, and after maybe ten minutes more of pounding each other, Blondy landed on me so hard I lit ten feet off on the flat of my shoulders. I couldn't do more than lie there with my nose spouting and the world wheeling round in slow circles.

When the fog cleared, I saw Blondy mounting the Golden Slipper steps with his elbows out, mighty pleased with himself. A hand reached down and helped me to my feet. Helen had my coat over her arm.

No man likes the girl he's with to see him beat, but maybe this would do what the rest of the evening hadn't. I mumbled to her through my shirtsleeves laid to my nose, "Wised up yet, kid? Now are you in the picture?"

She took the car keys from my pocket and boosted me in. "I can make the beach camp by my lone," I told her. "I don't need your help."

"We're not going to the beach," Helen said. "We're going to talk to my grandfather . . ."

The party was over, the pretty girls and the young officers gone. But Butcher Morgan was still up, sunk in a leather chair in his library with a glass by his hand and an unlit cigar, one of those skinny black ones he favoured, angled between his teeth. I had it fixed what to tell him. But he spoke first, a tired whitehaired old man who had made a pile out of lumber, and killed more than his share of loggers doing it.

"Your mother first," he said to Helen, us standing like kids before him. "Another wild one, running away at seventeen. Now you. I suppose it's in the blood."

He sighed, touched off his cigar, snapped the match between his fingers. "Well," he said, "no need to run, my dear. Your funds are in trust till you come of age. What will you two have from me in the meantime?"

It was me who answered. "We two will have nothing," I said. Helen's hand was in mine. Years after, she told me I'd gripped fit to crack her fingers. "But I'll have one thing." I gave him his woods-name to his face, while his hard, tired

eyes drilled me. "Unfreeze me, Butcher. I want to pull out."

Butcher Morgan searched my face a minute longer, then nodded.

"Have a drink with me, loader," he said, "before you go."

But I've never cared for Scotch whisky, and what needed doing wouldn't be easier for delay.

"You stick to your picture-making," I told Helen, "and have fun, and finish growing up."

"Will you come back, Red?" she asked me, anxious and low.

And I said, "I will. If the widowmaker don't tag me first."

I kissed her and went out of there with the mouse still in my left shoe, and my heart hurting worse than my face.

Because of a couple of two-bit lung scars from the orphanage days, the Canadian Army wouldn't have me, so I signed on a freighter and jumped ship at Sydney and enlisted in Kangaroo Jones' mob, who rate a man by the beer he can handle and how he stacks in a fight. After four mortal years the Aussies sent me home with a sergeant-major's crown and laurel on my sleeve.

I hadn't written to Helen or she to me. I figured she'd be engaged by now, or maybe married, and when I lit down from the taxi on Gunnery Point, I knew I was a bigger fool than when I turned up at her party. But I couldn't help myself, it was like a big wind pushed me.

The Butcher looked me up and down from his chair. "About time," he said. "I was convinced I had a spinster on my hands."

"Where is she?" I asked him. But there was no need. Helen stood in the library doorway, and we looked at each other, and I knew nothing had changed with us, or ever would.

In the books she'd have cried on my chest. Instead, Helen sprang a nosebleed and bled all over my campaign ribbons and such, and we wound up in the kitchen with me holding ice cubes to the back of her neck. She'd done a right nice job of growing. I guess I'd grown some too. I took a job pushing camp for her grandad, and handled it well, and that fall I married my black-haired girl . . .

So here I sit, in the leather armchair that used to be the Butcher's—Ransome J. Kelly on the outside and plain Red Kelly inside, strong in the back and still not too bright in the head. About this tough one Maury and her pilot tossed at us, I might as well have saved my worry. Having got me and my roarings off to the Quelth, Helen talked it over with those kids, and they've decided to put off marrying till he makes flight lieutenant.

Still, I did have a good sashay around Quelth burn, and it isn't every day a man gets to see a cougar.

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Cat Call

The trouble with a kitten is
THAT
Eventually it becomes a
CAT.

OGDEN NASH

Categorical

" If you have committed any kind of an error and anyone scolds you—wash," she was saying . . .

" Whatever the situation, whatever the difficulty you may be in, you can't go wrong if you wash . . . Oh, there are dozens of things! Door closed and you're burning yourself up because no one will open it for you—have yourself a little wash and forget it. Somebody petting another cat or dog in the same room, and you're annoyed about *that*—be nonchalant; wash. Feel sad—wash away your blues. Been picked up by somebody you don't particularly fancy and didn't smell good—wash him off immediately and pointedly where he can see you do it . . . Any time, anyhow, in any manner, for whatever purpose, wherever you are, whenever and why ever you want to clear the air or get a moment's respite to think things over—WASH! "

PAUL GALLICO, *Jennie*

Cat and Mous

Let take a cat, and foster hire with milke
And tendre flesh, and make hire couche of silke,
And let hire see a mous go by the wall,
Anon she weiveth milke and flesh, and all,
And every daintee that is in that hous,
Swiche appetit hath she to ete the mous.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

Many cat lovers are quite convinced that cats have a very definite language. It is certainly true that cats are capable of making a variety of queer little sounds, which possibly have some meaning. If you listen to your cat carefully you will notice quite a distinct variation in his voice when asking to be let out and when asking for a favourite tit-bit . . . Any true lover of cats will assure you that they have a language of sounds and gestures, each with a distinct meaning, which are only used to express certain thoughts, desires or feelings.

This cat language goes beyond the ordinary mew or purr, and if you live constantly with a cat and pay close attention to its "sayings," it will not be long before you know exactly what it is trying to convey by any of a dozen or more separate sounds and actions.

IAN HARMAN, *Cats for Pets and Show*

Plutocat

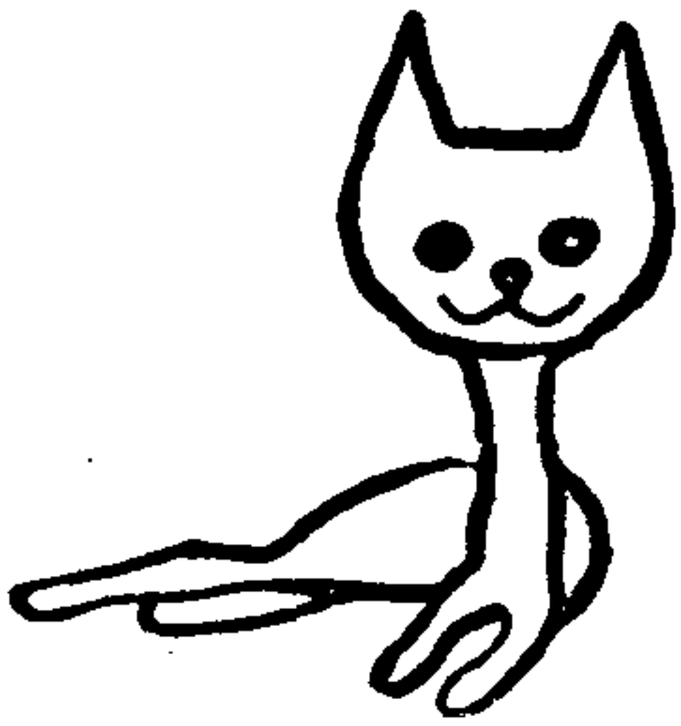
i ran onto mehitabel again
last evening
she is inhabiting
a decayed trunk
which lies in an alley
in greenwich village
in company with the
most villainous tom cat
i have ever seen
but there is nothing
wrong about the association
archy she told me
it is merely a plutonic
attachment
and the thing can be
believed for the tom
looks like one of pluto s demons

don marquis, *the old trouper*

Cat Trick

Visitors staying in the house should not fail to make themselves acquainted with Madame's cat. This is an engaging animal that swings by its legs, with remarkable velocity, around a revolving hatstand. It is an entertaining exhibition; but not one to be recommended to the diner who has taken a "fine" or two over the stipulated eight. He may be led to ascribe the phenomenon to his state of health.

NORMAN DAVEY, *The Hungry Traveller in France*



I'm a cat,
A lean cat,
A tabby, lithe and long,
And my whiskers are strong.
No pampered puss am I,
Old ladies pass me by,
I'm a lean cat . . .
I've no one to fuss me,
Or stroke me so gently,
I'm not called in at night,
I'm free to flirt or fight,
I'm a lean cat.

CHRISTINE HALL

Puss-suivant!

The most celebrated cat in heraldry was probably one which existed only in the jangling imagination of Don Quixote de la Mancha. Among the knights whom he believed that he beheld when he came upon a peacefully grazing flock of sheep was a certain Timonel de Carcajona, Prince of New Biscay, whose shield bore the figure of a cat, and the laconic motto, Miau.

DOROTHY MARGARET STUART, *A Book of Cats*

He blinks upon the hearth-rug
And yawns in deep content,
Accepting all the comforts
That Providence has sent . . .
Life will go on for ever,
With all that cat can wish:
Warmth and the glad procession
Of fish and milk and fish.
Only—the thought disturbs him—
He's noticed once or twice,
That times are somehow breeding
A nimbler race of mice.

ALEXANDER GRAY, *On a Cat Ageing*

Catnap

Mahomed so loved his cat that once when it lay sleeping against his arm and he was called away, he cut off the sleeve of his robe rather than disturb it.

CHRISTABEL ABERCONWAY, *A Dictionary of Cat Lovers*

Bride Price

by STEWART FARRAR

BUYING a wife can still happen—in England. Mark McBryant bought his, and I was there, hiding behind a tombstone, when he bought her. I stayed behind the tombstone because Jill's father and her two brothers were as large as I am and a lot tougher, all being fishermen; besides, to reveal myself would merely have complicated the bargaining.

Actually there was no bargaining. Once the price was named, Mark just said, "Yes."

I'd never known Mark's judgment—as a film director, I mean—to be warped before. I've been on a good many script recces with him; they have all been exhausting, alcoholic, and amatory but also successful. *Script by John J. Fox, Directed by Mark McBryant* may not be world-famous credits, but they're accepted in the trade as a modest guarantee of competence.

Neap Tide was good in the end. Though Gavinwich didn't feature in it.

Things really began to come unstuck the moment we walked into Gavinwich's one pub, the Lamb, and saw Jill behind the bar, polishing a glass. She asked what we'd have. It was the first time I'd seen Mark thrown out of his stride. Normally, he'd go straight into the kind of dialogue he demands in my scripts ("Tighter, John!—I want every syllable to carry the action forward!") but today he almost stammered, and it was I who had to order two beers.

He recovered at once, of course. But if Jill had known, that momentary confusion was the biggest compliment Mark had paid a woman in years.

I was more or less immune because my head was full of Sheila at the time—one purpose of the stop at Gavinwich was my daily phone call—but even I realised that Jill was almost too lovely to be true.

I've never seen such a head of hair on a girl in my life, for a start; it must have weighed several pounds, and it was that

rare true chestnut halfway between auburn and brunette. It poured down her back without so much as a hairpin, let alone a ribbon, to control it. If she'd been a hefty peasant type, maybe it would have been less striking—but she wasn't; she was a slender five foot ten with a Miss World figure. Her eyes matched her hair, and slanted up like a Walt Disney doe's. She was, I guessed, about nineteen. When she smiled at us, I told Mark to watch my drink, and hurried off to phone Sheila.

When I got back, re-immunised, Mark had booked us rooms. We'd meant to reach King's Lynn that evening, but I knew *that* was a dead loss. I'd known it as soon as Mark looked at her.

From then on, Mark was sunk.

In fairness, though—Mark's a professional, and Miss World herself couldn't stop him doing his job. Forty minutes later, full of sandwich and pickles, we were striding along Gavinwich's tiny quay, arguing as usual.

"It's a natural, John. Look at the cockeyed way that river ambles through the saltings—the sea's only a mile away, but the river takes at least three times that to reach it—and we've got all the set-ups we want, within a handy long-shot of the quay—"

"But what the hell *for*? The story doesn't need—"

"So much the worse for the story. I'm not wasting a location like this. Why not put that morning mist sequence here?"

"That was going to be in the Wash. Reeds and ducks and things."

Stewart Farrar prefers wine to beer, pipe to cigarettes, heat to cold, receipts to bills, and when pressed to define his philosophy says quite simply, he's " anti-anti."

He was six when he informed his family that he proposed to become a bookmaker like Barrie: he had just read Peter Pan— so they were all gratified in 1958 with the publication of his first whodunit, The Snake On 99. Six foot three and a half inches tall and " lazy," he says, " in proportion," he's half Scottish, quarter Yorkshire, and quarter Cockney, his grandmother possessing the requisite Bow Bells qualification.

Film documentaries led to television scripts which led to the Near and Middle East, countries now irrevocably in his blood and to which he gravitates on the slightest excuse. At present living in Battersea, he's hoping to acquire a vast cheap Victorian white elephant somewhere in East Anglia where he and his can pursue all their activities and still have room to eat and sleep.

★

Mark frowned, picking his teeth with a match. Then without a word he shot off towards the end of the quay, where a path sloped down to the saltings. By the time I caught up with him, round the next meander, one of my shoes was full of mud and my head was full of reasons why the story didn't need Gavinwich. He'd sat down on a springy clump of sea lavender, and I flopped beside him.

" See what I mean? " he asked, sweeping his arm round from the quay to the river mouth. " A calm day like this—camera pretty well on the deck, just catching glimpses of water between this stuff as we pan in with her—"

" In with whom? "

" *Her*, for instance."

Mark's eye was always quicker than mine. The squat hull had only just cleared the Ness, but he'd spotted the drifter at once— or perhaps he'd caught the thump of her Diesels before she appeared. I was silent, watching. She slid inland, winding her way among the fields of sea lavender.

" Blast you, Mark," I said at last. " I wish you weren't right so often."

" So do I," he answered cheerfully. " Gets monotonous."

We made our way back to the quay, where we sat on a wall to see the drifter come in. We argued about how the shape of the film could be altered to take in a Gavinwich sequence. How, not whether; because Jill or no Jill, I'd caught his feeling for the place. But in the middle of an enthusiastic bit of violence

to the original concept, Mark's voice tailed off. "Look, John," he interrupted himself, "her ensign's at half mast."

He was right. The greasy Red Duster hardly stirred from the halyards, but it was unmistakably lowered.

Our discussion stopped; whatever the unidentified tragedy was, it soon began to acquire substance. The men of Gavinwich, we realised, were converging on the quay, talking among themselves in low voices. We stayed by our wall, Mark taking off the only cap we possessed between us when he saw that the small gathering crowd was bareheaded; there weren't more than thirty, probably the entire adult male population of the village.

From the boat-builder's yard at the other end of the quay came a man pushing a handcart, which bore a coffin. An impossibly saintly old clergyman walked beside it, and a young man carrying a leather bag—the doctor, I guessed.

The knot of men on the quay parted to make way for them, and they and the drifter arrived together. As soon as she had made fast, the parson and the doctor went aboard, and four young men manhandled the coffin into the deck-house. There can't have been much room for it inside. The four young men waited quietly on the deck while the parson and doctor did whatever was needed, and the rest of us waited equally quietly on the quayside. There was nothing else Mark and I could do; we were the only strangers in a situation that involved the whole community, and our silent participation seemed all we could courteously offer.

At last the skipper of the craft put his head out of the deck-house and spoke to the four villagers; they helped him and his mate to edge the now heavier coffin reverently on to the deck and ashore. Without pausing, they heaved it to their shoulders and began their slow walk to the little flint church a quarter of a mile away. The rest of the village men led by the parson fell in behind. Uncertain what to do, Mark and I followed past the silent curtains of the single street.

I admit we were relieved when about a third of the men stopped outside the Lamb, stood looking after the cortège till it reached the church, and then turned into the bar to drink taciturn pints. What obscure protocol divided the village thus, we could not guess, but we were glad to join the drinkers. Jill was out of sight; a man served us.

"Odd," Mark whispered to me as we took our glasses to a corner. "Why no women? Out there, I mean."

It had puzzled me, too. "Local custom, I suppose."

Mark frowned. "Well, they'd obviously radioed ashore that

whoever-it-was had died—everyone was ready. But you'd think at least the family women would be there."

"Let's get away from here," I said suddenly. "I feel an intruder."

Mark nodded and drank up, and we went to recce a water-mill a couple of villages along the coast.

We got back to the Lamb about eight, and found the atmosphere had changed completely. Jill's father promised us a meal in twenty minutes, and practically ordered us to play darts meanwhile, detailing the two nearest locals to make up a four with us. My partner was the mate of the drifter, and we wiped the floor with Mark and one of Jill's brothers—romping home on a neat double 19 (mine) while they were still in three figures. We had just had time to drink our winnings when Jill's father called that the food was ready, in the parlour. Mark and I promised a return match later, and went through.

I was pretty pleased with myself, so I was grinning when I walked up to the table, and caught the full magnificence of Jill's answering smile. It winded me a little, but she transferred it to Mark and I rallied quickly.

Mark himself was back in form, slipping compliments past her defences with the ease I'd always envied. She finished laying the table, saying little but still smiling, while her eyes grew larger and more doe-like, and I'll swear her eyelashes grew, too. She'd looped her hair up in a mass that emphasised her top-of-the-milk shoulders—which were already done full justice by a wide and low neckline.

I was quite content to look at her and let Mark do the talking.

She said something about going to help her father; but somehow she was still with us by the time we were ready for coffee. I don't remember what the talk was about—except that it was quiet and relaxed and they seemed to have known each other for ever. Mark did mention what we'd seen on the quay, and Jill said it was a lad called Peter Blake—"no family, he just lived here." Then she changed the subject.

She didn't even have to leave us to make the coffee; one of those alchemist's outfits stood on the sideboard. She was pouring it out—a cup for herself, too—when Mark suddenly asked, "What's your surname, Jill?"

She brought the cups to the table and sat down again, unhurried. "Ramsay. Why?"

"Because I'm going to change it, one day soon."

I wasn't even surprised. An intimate calm had grown in the room which made the statement seem perfectly reasonable, and I just sat there looking at Jill. She said nothing, and her face

said nothing either. The great eyes were alive but uninformative, watching Mark.

Then, still unhurried, she lifted both her hands to the back of her hair, did something I couldn't see, and lowered them again to the table. She gave her head a little shake, and all at once her hair fell free, a rich brown cascade—so heavy that in the silence I actually heard it.

Never in my life had I seen a man's declaration so beautifully acknowledged. I remember thinking how Mark, that master of visual meaning, must have savoured it, and there was no cynicism in the thought.

I got up quietly and went out to phone Sheila—closing the parlour door as I left.

The recce wasn't exactly disrupted, but it was reorganised. Mark, in love, seemed to have redoubled his already considerable energy. For the next week we raced up and down the coast, clocking an inordinate mileage to get our work done and be back at the Lamb every night. Our producer sounded, over the phone, a little puzzled by our movements, but fortunately it was his habit to trust the men on the spot.

I expected a certain amount of resentment of Mark from the local boys—Jill was the most nubile girl for miles around, and he'd monopolised her from the day he arrived. But I saw no sign of it. Perhaps they'd tried and failed already; perhaps they recognised defeat because the thing was so obviously mutual.

They were friendly with me, too, which was just as well, because I saw precious little of Mark in the evenings, except at meals. I had some writing-up to do, and of course Sheila to phone. Apart from that, I spent a lot of my time playing darts—mostly with Morry, the mate of the drifter, or with Jill's brothers, according to who was ashore.

If Morry had been upset by the death of Peter Blake, he was good at hiding his feelings. The subject only came up once, and he said, almost in Jill's words, that Peter "had no folks in Gavinwich—he just lived here." I didn't even learn what Peter had died of. But it wasn't my business and I didn't ask. I saw the new grave in a corner of the churchyard when I was walking by one evening; there were a few flowers on it, already wilting.

The only time I allowed my curiosity to overstep tact was one evening when I was having a drink with the young doctor, Stoddart. I remarked that Peter Blake seemed to have been very quickly forgotten. Stoddart pushed out his lower lip thoughtfully, and then said, "I shouldn't jump to conclusions,

if I were you, Mr. Fox. Fishing communities develop their own protective mechanisms . . . Have the other half? "

I had the other half, and dropped the matter . . .

I can't say much about Mark and Jill and what passed between them, because although the three of us ate together every night, their relationship seemed almost telepathic. Not that they froze me out; as usual, Mark did most of the talking, and just as much to me as to Jill, while Jill's smiling stillness embraced me as their friend more clearly than if she had said so. But I had the feeling of a second, unspoken conversation going on at the same time—with daily increasing fluency.

We had to leave at last, of course; Mark has a very straightforward conscience, and there was at least three weeks' work to be done at another location away up north, plus a couple of weeks in London, before we could have even the flimsiest excuse for coming back.

Jill saw us off, her hair a chestnut ensign in the onshore breeze, saluting our departure. We were through Lincoln before Mark spoke a word. When he did, it was, " Five bloody weeks, John," and that carried us to Doncaster.

His spirits returned, of course, and we both worked like steam-engines for the next ten or twelve days, taking it in turns to be first in the phone box in the evenings. The script was shaping very nicely, though away from the immediate spell of Gavinwich I was beginning to have doubts again about Mark's plans for a Gavinwich sequence. Several times I almost told him so, but never quite; and then suddenly I didn't have to.

If the producer hadn't rung to say he wanted us both urgently in Norwich for a conference with the TV people about another film, I suppose things would have turned out differently. As it was, Mark decided to surprise Jill. We drove straight down to Norwich, had our conference next morning, put our producer on the London train, and reached Gavinwich in the middle of the afternoon—Mark nearly incoherent with excitement, and me pulling his leg about how right I'd been not to let him drive.

We were only fifty yards from the Lamb when we saw the drifter.

I was making some crack or other; it died on my lips. I braked, and we both stared down the little street at the quay.

Everything was the same—the twenty or thirty watchers, the dipped ensign, the saintly clergyman, the handcart against a wall, the six figures reverently manhandling the coffin ashore. Even—to make it more uncanny—the absence of wind, the height of the tide.

Neither of us spoke. I eased the car forward to park outside

the Lamb, and without looking at each other we started towards the quay. Halfway there, we stopped by the roadside, bare-headed; the cortège met us, passed us.

Up to then, I think, we had felt nothing but shock—realising that this time it would be no anonymous disaster, but the death of someone we knew. Perhaps Morry. Perhaps one of Jill's brothers . . .

Then I saw the villagers' faces.

With the first two or three, I thought I was mistaken. After the first dozen, I knew I wasn't. Each in his own way registered the same pattern as he caught sight of us: surprise, wariness, and then complete withdrawal—the dropping of a defensive shutter. They didn't want us to be there.

Not even the parson.

The silent procession moved on up the street. At the Lamb, a third of them broke off and went inside; the rest followed the coffin to the church.

"John," Mark said at last, "I don't like this. It feels wrong."

"Yes," I said.

Then Jill was running down the street, calling, throwing her arms round Mark, kissing his face; and after a while, holding out one hand to me. Her joy was transparent; it was the first time I had seen her lose her calm. But when the greetings were over, I could sense something else: tension. And I knew that Mark saw it as well.

His arm still round her, he inclined his head towards the church. "Who is it, Jill?"

For a moment she didn't answer; she glanced, for some reason, at me, as though she wanted help.

"Nobody you know, Mark. Honestly."

Mark frowned, puzzled.

"Please, both of you—don't worry. Please. It's nobody you know—I promise!"

The girl was almost in tears. To my relief, Mark didn't press the point. He buried a hand deep in her hair, caressing the nape of her neck and grinning at her. "Good enough. Now how about some tea? We're starving."

She took our arms, the tension easing a degree or two, and we went to the car for our bags . . .

By six o'clock, when the bar began to fill, everything seemed back to normal. The village welcomed us, bought us beers, played darts with us, and wanted to know what we'd been up to. Nobody mentioned the new coffin. I only asked one of them—Dr. Stoddart—and he gave the same answer as Jill: "Nobody

you know." He didn't exactly change the subject, but I found it got changed all the same.

Jill and Mark and I dined together, as usual, but the two of them were so blatantly in love with each other, their unspoken conversation so obviously tumbling over itself, that I hurried to finish my steak and kidney, pretended I didn't want any marmalade tart, and escaped. I decided to go for a walk.

It was a clear yellow evening, without even a breeze to stir the sea lavender. I took the path across the saltings that short-cuts the river's meanders towards the Ness, trying to identify the birds that sneaked or clattered out of my way. That grew more difficult, and I realised the light was fading. Even the villagers don't risk the saltings after dark, so I turned inland again, reaching the higher ground by the old lighthouse, and following the lane that joins the Norwich road above the church.

I still don't know if a nagging worry about that coffin led me towards the church, or if passing the church made the worry conscious . . . I leaned on the churchyard wall, trying to sort out what was churning over in my mind.

Two deaths, three weeks apart—not all that improbable, in a fishing community. Villagers who reacted oddly when two men —not, after all, strangers—turned up as the second body was being brought ashore. Two men dead who, in this close-knit community, were apparently without families—Peter Blake, and now this man.

Peter Blake . . . I went cold.

I had been staring, absently, at the new grave already dug for today's coffin; the oblong gaping black, the freshly-turned soil gleaming in the last of the light. But . . .

But it was Peter Blake's grave. The mound we had seen, a fortnight ago, decorated with a few tired flowers. Now it was reopened, empty. Empty?

I climbed over the wall and, queasily, went closer to make sure . . . It was empty; it was newly dug, or re-dug; and it was the grave where they had buried Peter Blake. Or where they said they'd buried him. Right in the corner of the churchyard. I couldn't be wrong.

For a while I stood there, gazing stupidly into the dim cavity. I felt afraid; but then I began to be curious, too. I wandered around, looking behind other tombstones, under yew trees—not really knowing what I was looking for. And in the grass about fifteen feet away—longish grass, the only clear patch within reach—I could see where a coffin had rested. The shape was quite clear, and there were little pancakes of soil, the soil of the grave-floor, flattened within it.

I went on my knees to examine it. There wasn't any doubt; a coffin had been lifted out of the grave and put down here.

Something caught my eye among the grass-roots a yard away, and I picked it up. It was a light-coloured packet, slightly larger than a matchbox, wrapped in what felt like oilskin. I decided to open it, then changed my mind and slipped it into my pocket.

I must talk to Mark, I thought.

There was no point in climbing the wall again, because the gate lay in the direction I wanted to take, so I walked along the side of the church. As I passed the nave windows I saw there was a light inside. Someone watching over today's coffin, perhaps? On an impulse I tiptoed along the grass to the west door, and opened it a bare inch.

The coffin was there, all right, on its trestles. Nearby I could see the back of a man's head where he sat in a pew, reading a magazine. It didn't seem to be the kind of magazine one would normally read during a vigil over a dead friend.

"The *same* grave, John? Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure! And look, I found this." I tried to open the oilskin package but it was well sealed, and I got some nail-scissors to unpick it, while Mark sat on my bed looking puzzled. I'd been lucky to catch him right away; Jill was having to help her father for an hour, because he was single-handed tonight . . .

Inside the oilskin was tissue paper. And inside the tissue paper, a very handsome Swiss watch.

Odd the things you do when you're completely taken aback. I just sat there with my mouth open, winding up the watch; and when it was wound, I set it by my own.

"I wonder," Mark said, "how many of those things you can pack into a coffin?"

"Depends who's in it," I answered, distastefully. "But why should anyone?"

"An empty coffin, clot!"

The penny dropped. "You mean—smuggling?"

"What else? I know one watch isn't much to go on, but it hangs together, doesn't it? That watch was packed so that it didn't take up much room, and wouldn't come to any harm even if it was ducked in sea water. Add all this nonsense about dead sailors with no families, and only one grave between them . . ."

"And I was thinking of murder, body-snatching, black magic, the lot. Smuggling—is *that* all!"

But I'd forgotten this conscience of Mark's. He jumped off the bed and harangued me like an angry headmaster. By the time he'd finished I felt thoroughly delinquent, and guilty of a criminal indifference to the interests of society, a woodworm in the economic fabric.

"The whole bloody village must be in on it," he thundered. "And you're as bad as they are!... I'm going to get Jill, and find out what's going on here."

I stayed in my room trying to puzzle it out—and to work up indignation where all I could really feel was relief. I'm fond of Mark, I respect him, and in this case I knew he was perfectly right; but I was much less concerned about the economic fabric than about the mess he would get himself in with Jill and the village. I spent an unhappy hour, and I expect Jill did, too.

Mark was more subdued when he came back, but he still looked determined.

"Well?" I asked.

"She won't tell me. She admits there's something, but she's begging me to leave it alone."

"What do you expect? In your present state, telling you would be the same as handing her family, and her friends and neighbours, straight over to the police. Not to mention the local copper himself—he must be in it, too... She's right, Mark. Leave it alone. Do you want to lose her?"

He looked at me, and said, "Oh, hell!"

"You're bound to, if you land everyone she knows in jug," I persisted. Then, unwisely, I added, "We know damn-all, anyway. Let's keep it like that."

I should have known better. Five minutes later we were creeping round the churchyard with a torch.

We didn't find any more packets, of course; I'd been very lucky, or unlucky, to find that one. I did my best to prevent Mark making too much noise. After a while I lost heart. I leaned against a tombstone in the dark, wondering what the hell to do with him, while he lay on his belly shining the torch into the open grave.

So when they crept up and surrounded him, I was out of sight. I hesitated a moment, and then decided to stay hidden, promising myself I'd pile in if they started any rough stuff, and hoping devoutly they wouldn't. There were, after all, five of them; Jill's father, her two brothers, Dr. Stoddart—and the parson.

It was the clergyman who spoke first, sounding ancient and benign but quite inflexible. "Can we help you, Mr. McBryant?"

Mark was on his feet, shining the torch at each face in turn—with remarkable calmness, I thought. Then he asked, "Would

you object to my looking inside the coffin that's standing in your church?"

The clergyman sighed. "I'm sure I could find both ecclesiastical and legal reasons for objecting, my boy. But it wouldn't do any good, would it? An enterprise such as the one by which my little flock prospers depends on complete absence of suspicion. Let us admit, therefore, that the coffin in our church contains five thousand eight hundred Swiss watches. We haven't counted them yet, of course; but even though our invoicing system is necessarily by word of mouth, it has proved to be reasonably accurate . . . Does that answer your question?"

Not many people can take the wind out of Mark's sails, but the parson had him groggy for a moment. He stammered something about consecrated ground . . .

"Oh no, my dear boy. We are particular about such things. This corner is quite ordinary ground; we moved the wall to include it, some years ago."

"I wouldn't tell him too much, Vicar," Jill's father growled.

"Why not, Mr. Ramsay? We are already in his hands."

"An' he's in ours," Mr. Ramsay pointed out.

"True—but neither side is going to take advantage of either fact. You'll see . . . I know what Mr. McBryant is going to ask next—'How about the sacrilege of conducting spurious funerals in the church?'—which after all is consecrated ground, and has been since 1286—or 1288; the actual date is in dispute owing to the depredations of mice on the parish records . . . As I was saying—the problem doesn't arise; we have not yet been obliged to conduct any such funeral. The purpose of the whole performance has been twofold: first, to make possible the actual landing of the shipments without suffering the interference of H.M. Customs and Excise—on the rare occasions when they are around—or rousing the curiosity of chance visitors; and second, what I may call the ritual of tradition. It arose when I was a young curate in the twenties, and we found that the local representative of H.M. Customs had an almost pathological respect for the dead. There are doubtless other ways of landing such shipments, but tradition, once established—"

"But you—a minister of the Church—"

"Tradition again, my boy. If you remember your poem, 'Brandy for the parson' is listed before all the other items and their recipients . . ."

The clergyman was really getting into his stride—and splendid listening it made; but Mark, too, is something of a preacher when he's excited, and soon they were at it hammer and tongs—Mark flinging denunciations, and finding them

parried with dialectical charm. Filling in the gaps, too. I learnt that once a "body" had been brought to the church, it was not interred until the village was free of strangers—its normal state.

The "body" then remained in the grave until a convenient moment for handing it over to—whoever it was.

This angered Mark still further. Was falsification any better than sacrilege? etc. etc.

The Ramsays were getting restless, I could see. The clergyman seemed to realise it too. With calm authority he raised a hand to stop Mark in mid-sentence, and asked, "Do you wish to marry Mr. Ramsay's daughter?"

For the first time since the debate started, I was afraid. I really thought Mark was going to lose his temper—and then I would have had to join in. But he controlled himself.

"Yes," he said.

"In that case, let us be practical. Jill will be nineteen in three months' time. So without her father's permission, you cannot marry her for two and a quarter years. She is a very popular and attractive girl, and the likelihood of her still being available, in two and a quarter years' time, to a suitor whose work prevents him from visiting this remote village except on the rarest occasions, is, I would suggest, equally remote. On the other hand, if you were to give your word that both you and your colleague, Mr. Fox—who is very probably listening—will keep your knowledge of our little enterprise to yourselves, I have no doubt Mr. Ramsay will welcome you as an immediate son-in-law."

Mark looked slowly round at the Ramsays, the doctor, and again at the clergyman. "You damned old reprobate," he said.

The parson chuckled. "It is just as well this is not consecrated ground. Suggesting that a parish priest has incurred damnation, while you are actually within the precincts of his church, raises interesting—"

"All right," Mark interrupted him. "I promise."

"I shall be delighted to officiate at the ceremony myself."

That was some time ago, now. My god-daughter can already sit on her own hair . . . Mark is far less prone to preach, these days. If he ever has a relapse in my presence, and falls into the old habit, I've a formula for humbling him. I simply ask him the time, so that he has to look at his masterpiece of a watch. That shuts him up.

Mind you, to provide the excuse, I have to pull down my cuff to hide my own.

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LANDSMAN

I AM a man who, though I have spent much time at sea, detests the ocean. Its motion nauseates me and the men who follow this calling are rough and brutal folk.

The adventure which I am about to describe occurred many years ago among the remote islands that lie between Tahiti and New Guinea. That I was there at all was due to my father's idea that since I was unequipped to earn a living in Europe owing to my dissolute and idle habits, a coconut plantation in the South Seas could solve his problems and my own, for this admirable man had reached a stage where his patience was exhausted, and he could no longer stand the sight of me, though I was his only son.

I use the word adventure advisedly because, as all know who have endured them, there is no such thing. An adventure is a misadventure which, by the grace of God and your own perspicacity, you survive. Then, over the years, exaggerated by the magnifying glass of time, the despicable and horrible truth assumes a kind of heroic grandeur in which inevitably you, by a process of elimination and selection, play a leading role.

Being more honest than most, I propose to tell the truth about those terrible days which only now do I find myself able to think about, much less describe.

If I was a hero it was by default, no other of our company being left alive at the end of it.

The *Mermaid*, the trading schooner in which I pursued my unenthusiastic search for a suitable plantation, suddenly came to a stop. The sails came down and I was roused from my rest by the shouts of the crew.

Leaving the miserable cabin—misnamed stateroom—that resembled a large coffin, inhabited chiefly by rats and cockroaches which appeared to resent my presence, I went on deck to discover what all the to-do was about. Anything was a change from the interminable watery plains of the sea, which was only varied by palm-fringed islands that looked as if they were about to founder at any moment.

A curious sight met my eyes. Not far away—I find distance impossible to estimate on land or water—a ship floundered.

by Stuart Cloete

A schooner, they said, her rig being similar to ours—but she was smaller. The sails flapped haphazardly like the wings of a wounded bird. The bowsprit was smashed and hung like a beak into the sea.

There appeared to be no one on board, no one alive at least, since there was no answer to our hails of "Ahoy there!" and similar nautical greetings.

Our Captain, a one-eyed scoundrel named Larsen whose triple interests were money, drink, and women, and in that order—the first being necessary to enjoy the other two—was already launching the long boat, his solitary orb glittering at the thought of salvage, when I joined him on deck and politely asked what was going on.

"Going on, you bloody fool!" he said. "Ain't you got eyes in your bloody head? Look at her adrift. Salvage. That's what that is, and money as good as in the bank."

The man was an Australian of Swedish origin and there was no empathy between us. So, partly to get away from him, partly out of boredom, and partly out of curiosity—for there was certainly something curious going on aboard this stricken ship—I asked if I might join the boat's crew and go aboard her.

"You've paid your fare, Mr. Hentey," he said, "and you can go to hell if you like."

I left him somewhat affronted and went over the side with never a thought of how accurate his diagnosis had been as I settled myself in the stern.

We pushed off and the sailors rowed with the short, choppy stroke so different from that of a shell on the Cam. A stroke, I thought, typical of their rude mentality. They shoved the oars deep into the water and then jerked them back, their muscles cording their arms as they strained, utterly without grace, but nevertheless propelling the boat competently enough.

Coming alongside, the mate who was in command shouted again, bellowing like a bull. Nothing happened except that two big gulls, whose presence I had not noted previously, rose from the deck and flew off, only to return and circle us, crying harshly. Even I, a landsman, a man more accustomed to the drawing-rooms of great cities than the hard seats of a boat on the ocean, felt that this was an omen. If there were men on board they were dead. If there were no men—this suddenly became an even worse possibility—where had they gone?

Undeterred, Sam Wallis, the mate, a giant utterly without sensibility, seized a line that hung into the water over the stern and climbed on board. A moment later he shouted, "Come on up. She's ours."

Leaving two men in the boat, sufficient to hold her in the calm oily swell, we followed him. I was astonished at how well I climbed the clammy rope. I can only believe that the sharks I saw below me gave my arms the strength to drag myself on to the deck.

The mate was already employed in cutting down the flapping jib and getting up the sail to bring her nearer to the *Mermaid* when I, having no interest in these evolutions, went down the companionway into what was evidently a kind of small saloon.

I knew now what the Captain hoped. A ship so small was useless as a trader carrying ordinary cargo. So only one thing was left—one trade—for so small, neat, and pretty a vessel. For this I appreciated now, being aboard her. Something he had guessed, having examined her through the glasses that he had not had the courtesy to lend me.

For neat she was, and clean and beautiful: like a small neat woman walking alone. A pearler. Not a ship with divers, but a pearl trader whose safe might hold gems worth thousands.

Then I recoiled with a scream, shouting for the mate.

"Sam—Sam," I cried, "for Christ's sake come here." I cried without blasphemy, for what I had seen needed the assistance of our Lord if we were to survive.

"There—" I said—"there—" pointing. The great hairy beast at my side blanched.

"Oh God!" he said.

Now he was a blasphemous man, accustomed to taking God's name in vain at every opportunity—a foul-mouthed man—one well used to the horrors of every dive and brothel from Sydney to San Francisco and the Cape. But he was not swearing now. This was his way of praying, of calling to God for help.

There before us was a thing that looked like the severed leg of an enormous woman, viscid, pink, pulpy. If, that is, a woman could have a leg thirty feet long armed with suckers that looked like lanced boils.

Beside it, on the companionway, standing on a step, its handle erect, was the axe that had severed the limb. A great weight of horror descended upon me as I realised what I was looking at. I opened my mouth in a silent O, gasping like a fish, as I tried to say the word.

He said it for me.

"Octopus," he said. "By heaven, it got them all. It smashed the bowsprit. It—"

At that moment there was a scream from the deck above. The ship heeled as if something heavy was climbing over the side.

The mate seized the axe and leapt up the stairs.

I will say this for that brutal man: he was utterly without fear, like so many of his calling—and also, it goes without saying, completely lacking in imagination. As a passenger I felt no need to follow him, for though not lacking in courage I have always succeeded in retaining a sense of discretion which has served me well. I therefore did the only reasonable thing there was to do. I closed and bolted the door and sat down to contemplate this dreadful severed limb, more like a pinkish snake now than a woman's leg, that lay before me, and awaited the outcome of the fracas that was taking place above my head.

There were shouts, curses, yells, bangs, and thumps. The schooner rocked like a cradle. Then there was silence and the cabin was darkened as a great pink arm almost covered the circular glass of the porthole. I had a close view of a sucker which gripped it. It looked like a great sea anemone—a purplish suction cup that contracted and expanded as it increased and reduced its pressure. It was now evident that the combat on the deck was over and that we had lost. I had no affection for my shipmates, but their death might easily mean my own. It was impossible to believe that the mate could have failed to succeed in any physical engagement that he undertook. But failed he had.

Fascinated, rooted to the carpet with horror, I watched the large pink tendril move downwards into the sea. Cup followed cup in an endless undulating movement. The limb that bore them grew thicker and thicker. Then the light was completely obliterated as the body of the monster slid into the sea with a splash. The list to port as it crept over the side was righted and the ship again floated on an even keel.

Now there was the sound of a shot. It was followed by more shots, a tattoo of rapid fire and, moving to extend my view of the ocean, I saw that the *Mermaid* had drifted much nearer to us and now lay only a short distance away. It was coming nearer as if dragged by some invisible hand.

Our Captain stood on the deck, a rifle in his hand, pouring bullet after bullet into the great creature that sat like a gigantic pink egg upon the deck. Two of its arms waved in the air almost as high as the mast. One of them held a man. Stuck to its suckers, he struggled like a fly on a flypaper, beating his arms like wings. Even through the closed port I could hear his screams.

The *Mermaid* listed as another of these creatures climbed aboard. Now I had a perfect view of this mountainous squid as it faced me. Its two arms were as long as those of its fellow. Between the two long arms were eight shorter, thicker tentacles, all joined to what can only be described as its face, if we can use

such a word for this feature. The mouth, a dark orifice surmounted by a great horned beak resembling that of a giant macaw, was flanked by two luminous yellow eyes, bigger than soup plates, with black pupils. The rosy egg-shaped bodies of these creatures were, as far as I could see, fully twelve feet high, almost as wide, and considerably longer. This fight was soon over too. I closed my eyes as the second monster swept the Captain, rifle and all, into its beak. The suspended man had by this time also disappeared and so must the rest of the crew.

And now I saw that the whole sea was alive with these creatures—rolling, waving their tentacles, like the trunks of a herd of elephants above the still blue water. Here and there one swam at an immense speed backwards, trailing its tentacles like terrible ribbons behind it.

Now I was alone in a ship I could not sail, without any idea of where I was, surrounded by a herd of gigantic sea monsters that belonged in some nightmare of mythology.

My legs gave way and I fell, almost on to the long severed tentacle that lay with its end coiled like a snake on the cabin floor. I stared at it, fascinated. This was no dream, no nightmare, but a stark and horrible reality. This corrupt and evil relic was now my only companion.

I brought myself to touch it. My finger sank into its soft flesh. Its skin felt like a thick, cool, rubbery satin, covered with a design of pores distributed like that of pigskin. Each pore was darker than the surrounding rose-madder flesh and almost purple in colour. The tentacles closed in death like tulip buds at sundown. From the wound at the base of the arm viscid fluid flowed, milky and faintly iridescent. The smell that I had been too preoccupied to notice now reeked in my nostrils—faintly sweet but sickeningly fishy—a combination of rotting fish and the odour of summer garbage exposed to the heat in some vile slum.

How was I to get rid of it? It was evident that I could not. It was far too heavy to pick up, even if I could have brought myself to do it. I doubt if three strong men could have raised it. With some sharp instrument I might have cut it into sections and so disposed of it, but all I found was the late Captain's table-silver—the knives totally unfitted for such a job. And besides, to achieve its disposal, even in sections, I should have to open the port. This I knew I would never do, being assured that living duplicates of the dead limb I was attempting to dispose of would at once come into the cabin and suck me out.

I was going to have to live with this piece of shocking offal till

something happened. I did not know what would happen. What indeed could happen?

I pulled myself together and found in a fitted walnut cabinet a bottle of whisky and a glass. There were other bottles there but I fell upon this like a friend, and gulped down half a tumbler neat. Dutch courage, it is true, but I had no other and it came to my aid as the neat spirit flowed through my veins.

With some astonishing reversion to my childhood, and my mother's injunction to keep my room tidy, I picked up the small end of the tentacle and dragged it towards the thicker, immovable portion. Here I rolled it neatly, coiling it as I had seen the sailors coil a line on the deck of the *Mermaid*. Then, as if out of respect for the dead, I covered this heap with a red-and-blue striped blanket I tore from the bunk and, seeing a bottle of disinfectant on a shelf, poured it like a libation on the corpse.

The cabin now smelled like a morgue with the mixture of putrefaction and disinfectant but, satisfied that I had done my best, I poured another drink and sank into the swivel chair that was screwed to the floor by the Captain's desk.

In the bulkhead before me was a shelf of books. Nautical books, sailing directions, and so on, were arranged on the left. The rest were books of poetry—Tennyson, Burns, Kipling, Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of English Verse*, Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, and Shakespeare's sonnets. Just the kind of poems a mariner would enjoy, I thought—catholic enough but simple.

My mind now dwelt on the Captain. Not on his fate—I knew it well enough—but on what manner of man he had been, on my strange intimacy with this individual who had disappeared. I felt his presence. Why, even the pillow which I had exposed when I had pulled off the blanket spoke of him. It was darkened with the brilliantine he used and smelled of violets. One thing I knew about him now. He was not bald. The perfume and the poetry suggested that he had been romantic—a ladies' man.

I searched the desk and found nothing of interest. No log, no diary, no account book, no cheque book. What was his name? I pulled the Tennyson from the shelf. *James A. Man.* What did the A stand for? Alexander? Amos? Andrew? There was something curious about the anonymity of the few papers I found in the drawers.

Evidently James Man was an individual who did not want his affairs made public in any way. I thought of how a man, wishing to change his identity, clipped all the markings from his clothes. The papers were mostly accounts from ships' chandlers and tradesmen; all were made out in the ship's name, the *Albatross*.

It occurred to me that till this moment I had not known the name of the vessel that was at once my home, my prison, my castle—and might well become my grave.

I looked out of the port again.. Those Things were still there, now apparently disporting themselves in a friendly or even amorous manner. With their hideous arms entwined, they performed astonishing aquatic arabesques.

Further search of the desk revealed a secret drawer, and in the drawer was a flat key. A safe key. A further and quite perfunctory search revealed the safe, hidden behind a seascape in oils that was hinged to the bulkhead.

Trembling, I opened it. There was a small canvas bag of money, both notes and gold. The money was in French, English, and American currency.

A second bag—I had saved it till last as a child saves the cherry on his cake—contained just what I hoped, but much more than I had hoped. The finest pearls I had ever seen—each perfect. Among them were a dozen big black pearls and a pink one as big as a marble. I poured them from one hand into the other as if they were buttons. I thought, Here is a fortune. Now I need grow no copra, nor spend my life among savages on some atoll in the southern seas.

Here was every luxury concentrated in my two palms as I held them "treasure cupped." New York, London, Paris. I saw fine meals and rare wines spread out before me. I felt the soft hands of beautiful women about my neck and then suddenly I despaired.

Now that I had the means, I had no method of enjoying the pleasures. My position was even worse than when the pleasures were actually before me and I had lacked the means of enjoying them. Then at least I had been secure and had my dreams. I was still young. There was still time and it was better to be surrounded by hungry creditors than giant squids.

I have no idea what happened next. I think I must have fainted with exhaustion. Perhaps I drank more whisky, perhaps I was overwhelmed by the stench of the cabin, or by a combination of all three. I must have passed out for some time, because it was morning when I came to as I could see from the position of the sun. At first I thought there must be a storm. Then I realised that I was hearing gunfire, and I reached the porthole in time to see a small warship engage the monsters that were attacking it.

Sailors armed with cutlasses hacked at waving tentacles. Guns were firing at the squids in the water. Then the gunboat,

if that is what it was, set off at speed, cutting one creature in two and dropping depth charges behind it.

Overwhelmed at my rescue I came to a fantastic decision. I thought of the pearls. I saw them as evil. I thought of the temptation they might prove to the virtue of honourable young women if they remained in my possession, of the deaths they had already been party to, and before I could control my impulse I opened the port and dropped them overboard, not knowing that the deceitful James Andrew Man—his name was Andrew—had sent a description of every pearl to his agent in New York who were to have disposed of them. In consequence, though I was searched and questioned, no one believed my story, and I have remained under suspicion all these years, though my penury should have been apparent to all.

As to the squids, the explanation appears to be that some underwater cataclysm disturbed these monsters of the deep that are apparently known to science as krakens, and the *Mermaid* had sailed right into their lair.

The warship *Sparrow*, passing by, had seen two schooners out of control and come to investigate the cause. The story never appeared in the press. No one would have believed it nor would it have brought any credit to the Navy. So I tell it now as the sole survivor of this horrible adventure. Believe it or not, it is true, and it turned my hair white at the age of thirty-three.

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GOOD BOX OFFICE

I have had very few fan letters in the course of my career, always excepting the incoherent but enchanting babblings from Ghana. They all read rather like the following :

> Dear Sir,
>
> I am very happy to write you this letter. The reason why I write you this letter. I want only of your free photograph, so that I will never forget your name in my life. I have the honour and most respectful to inform you these few lines because I have heard so much of your free photographs and it is very nice for people to see so I beg you to try and send me your nice photograph. I wish to end here this letter.

And " end it here " they usually do, with no legible signature or just " your loving friend " followed by the number of a box, as they all seem to live in Boxes in Ghana.

PETER BULL, *I Know the Face, But . . .*

Georges Simenon

MAIGRET returns to Argosy

in a dramatic short novel complete next month in

argosy

DUCAL IMPOSTOR

by

GERALD SPARROW

IT is difficult to understand, in 1962, the kind of life that was lived by the greatest English families only a hundred years ago.

The dukes of Portland, Devonshire, and Westminster were not only fabulously wealthy, they were little kings. They had great country estates, owning entire villages as well as their vast country houses. In London their courts moved to regal mansions that have survived almost into the present day—it is only thirty years ago that Devonshire House in Piccadilly was demolished.

In the country, on their own land, often twenty thousand acres of it, they were supreme. When the dukes travelled abroad it was a royal progress; their families, secretaries, and servants went, too. It was the period of the rich and powerful English nobility who were treated with the same genuflecting concern wherever they went. They lived in a golden world that seemed as secure as the oaks at Welbeck Abbey.

Perhaps it was the fact that the great dukes had everything the world could give that often made them capricious, not to say eccentric. Mild eccentricities were regarded with indulgent awe as being a right of the aristocracy.

Even by the standards of the middle nineteenth century, the fifth Duke of Portland was a major eccentric—but then he was a major duke, as rich as any, a prince in all but name.

Welbeck, the family seat, stands today as proudly and as immutable as it did a hundred years ago. The vast pile has an air of serenity, but also of mystery. It is the sphinx of ducal mansions.

The fifth Duke's eccentricities were numerous. He was at times very generous and at other times almost fanatically mean.

He was gay and then positively morose, and, more disconcertingly, he vanished every now and then.

Now the English countryside, both the county and the farmers, were used to ducal eccentricity and were accustomed to making allowances for the great, but the Duke's habit of suddenly not being there bewildered even his closest friends and relatives.

One day he would be shooting with friends. Everything in the great house would be going in its accustomed manner. The servants' hall, with its own elaborate rules and protocol, would be functioning smoothly. The Duke's marshal would be supervising the household. The guests, each with their personal man or woman servant, would be enjoying the Duke's regal hospitality. Then, next day, without warning, the sun around which all the planets orbited was no longer in the heaven. No Duke. No explanation. The flag was lowered on Welbeck tower.

This odd state of affairs could probably have gone on for ever, being of concern only to the Duke's friends, a limited circle, and a matter for gossip among his tenants, had not a Mrs. Annie Maria Druce, in need of funds to pursue litigation in which she was involved, sold her story, which was the subject of the action, to *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* in March 1898.

Her claim then received the widest publicity and it intrigued the world, for, if it were true, it explained the mystery of the vanishing Duke in a way that would delight, horrify, or startle the British reading public, according to the view they took of ducal morality, and their estimate of the truth or untruth of the story which Mrs. Druce told.

Briefly, her tale was that the marriage at New Windsor, Berkshire, on 30th October 1851, between her late husband's father and mother, described in the registration as being between Thomas Charles Druce, bachelor, and Annie May, spinster, was, in reality, a marriage between the Marquess of Titchfield, afterwards the fifth Duke of Portland, and the illegitimate daughter of the fifth Earl of Berkeley.

The couple, said Mrs. Druce, had lived together for many years before the marriage and her husband was the eldest son of the union.

Moreover, Mrs. Druce went on to say that the eccentricities of the Duke, which were generally accepted, had enabled him to carry out an amazing imposture over the years, splitting his personality so that he was at one and the same time the master of Welbeck and Thomas Charles Druce, the draper and owner of a famous furnishing bazaar in Baker Street.

Mrs. Druce, who was one of those ladies impossible to silence,

went on to point out that the innumerable underground passages and tunnels under Welbeck Abbey, which had been a source of mystery and speculation for many years, were not contrived for the cellaring of the Duke's great and growing collection of wine, but served the very practical purpose of enabling the Duke to leave to join his coach on the London road without anyone at Welbeck being the wiser, and also of enabling him, when he tired of being Mr. Druce the draper, to reappear as the Duke of Portland in his own mansion.

No wonder this story attracted the fascinated pens of the world's journalists. In France the papers at once pointed out that even Englishmen were capable of the highest deceit when it came to love. The German journals inclined to disbelieve the whole story, for how, they asked, could an aristocrat ever bear to present himself as a plebeian shopkeeper? In Italy eager readers were presented with the case of the Duke who tired of his golden cage.

But it was, of course, in Britain that the possibilities of Mrs. Druce's story evoked the most passionate interest. The story, from the point of view of the journalists and the public, had everything—romance, duplicity, a split personality, and all these centring on one of the greatest houses in the land. The press went to town on the Druce-Portland mystery.

There seems to be no doubt that Mrs. Druce believed her fantastic version of the Portland saga. But it at once became clear that, by pursuing her claim, she had made determined enemies, and not only at Welbeck. The remaining members of the Druce family who had been left very well off—it was part of Mrs. Druce's case that the Duke had transferred valuable properties from himself as Duke to himself as Druce—opposed Mrs. Druce as strongly as did the family itself.

At each turn Mrs. Druce was met with inflexible opposition, from magistrates, from cemetery officials, from the law officers of the Crown. The pliant gentlemen of the law were eager to assist a house so wealthy and so firmly entrenched as that of the Duke of Portland against the " claims of an eccentric impostor."

It was typical of this England that no one hesitated to state his views in print or by the spoken word even if legal action was pending or under way. The conception of " contempt," though it existed, appears to have been overridden by the anxiety of one and all to vindicate the honour and interest of the powerful and influential.

Mrs. Druce started her fight with everyone except one or two interested newspapers against her. It is interesting to note that the press then, as now, could take an independent line

against the social current of the times. To them it was the story that mattered—and Mrs. Druce might be right . . .

Mrs. Druce said that at the Baker Street premises, too, there were subterranean passages and secret exits which enabled the incoming Duke to reappear as Mr. Druce just as the Welbeck passages permitted the incoming Mr. Druce to reappear as the Duke.

The deception, said Mrs. Druce, continued for years until the Duke, realising he had been too bold and that the gossip was becoming too well informed and detailed, decided to bury Druce. This he achieved, it was said, by burying an empty coffin, or by placing in the coffin a body not that of Druce himself.

It was felt that these little arrangements were not beyond the powers of a wealthy aristocrat eccentric. The slipping of his golden sovereigns would ease the way; all would be done, quietly, secretly, with that cunning which the English have always denied possessing, but which foreigners do not hesitate to declare one of our leading national characteristics.

Now the fact as to who, if anyone, was in the Druce-Portland coffin was, one would have thought, capable of immediate verification by the simple process of opening the coffin, but Mrs. Druce found it was not as simple as that.

In 1896 she applied to the Home Secretary for an exhumation order, filing her evidence at the Home Office in support of her petition. Her request was met with extreme scepticism and Mrs. Druce was told that she should first apply to the courts. This, of course, is a fine example of the ancient official custom of passing the buck, as strong and frequently invoked today as ever it was in Mrs. Druce's time. But Mrs. Druce was a determined woman, with unshakable conviction in her case. She approached the Bishop of London who, in no time at all, had turned her over to the tender mercies of the Chancellor of the Diocese who, unable to escape, called a Consistory Court which was held in St. Paul's on 9th March 1898.

The Chancellor appears to have been an honest, openminded official, for it was he who pointed out that the death certificate of the corpse—whoever he was—had not been signed by a doctor, a most suspicious circumstance. He made an order that the vault could be opened but that all those who had an adverse interest should be notified and might lodge their objections. Mrs. Druce found herself, in spite of the favourable order, bogged down in interminable delay of which the family and the other Druces made good use.

Not waiting for the objectors to enter their interminable pleas,

Mrs. Druce next brought an action in the High Court to revoke the will of T. C. Druce which would have left Herbert Druce, her husband's illegitimate, older brother, disinherited. The judge decided there was only one way to settle the matter—by opening the grave. On this Mrs. Druce went back to the Chancellor and petitioned that his original order for the opening should now be carried out.

In the meantime "the Home Office had been talking to the law officers of the Crown" and out of the blue, but presumably as a result of this private, powerful conversation, the Home Office issued an order that the grave was not to be opened without the express consent of the Home Office. Someone was becoming afraid.

This crude interference by the executive in the decisions of the Courts provoked hostile comment even in the political and social climate of the day. It was felt to be too brazen and open a challenge to the rights of the citizen.

Fortunately when Mrs. Druce returned to him, the Chancellor of the Diocese took a similar view. How, he asked, could an order of the Home Office override the joint decision of the High Court and the Consistory Court? The Chancellor called the cemetery company before him, and the grave was on the point of being opened when the Queen's Bench ordered a stay of all further proceedings. Mrs. Druce began to despair . . .

Then, a bombshell. The *Dispatch* published a circumstantial story of Thomas Druce having contracted a previous marriage in Australia in 1816, the son of this marriage being still alive. For six years there was silence. Mrs. Druce gave up, her cases collapsing.

In 1905 the ghost of the Druce-Portland case was given a new lease of vigorous life, but now the actors on the stage were changed. The leading role was taken by George Druce, the long-lost son, who appeared in London. Nor did he lack money. Companies were formed, in the fashion of the day, and these companies had as their one objective the solution of the Druce-Portland mystery in the interest of George. The companies—G. H. Druce Limited and the Druce-Portland Company among others—started by prosecuting Herbert Druce for perjury concerning the death of his father, T. C. Druce.

Again the Court said the grave should be opened to settle this matter. Again the Consistory Court made an order to that effect. This time the law officers dare not frustrate the course of events. The tomb was opened on New Year's Eve, 1907. *The Times*, reporting the event, said, *The name-plate having been removed and washed, the inscription became visible... The lid was*

removed. . . displaying a shrouded human figure which proved to be that of an aged, bearded man.

One of the late Mr. Druce's partners in the Baker Street business, with the help of photographs, identified the body as that of the late T. C. Druce. The summons in the perjury proceedings was dismissed after prosecuting counsel, with more discretion than courage, had withdrawn from the case.

What are we to believe? The law seems to have assumed that if Druce was in the coffin, the whole story was untrue. Could there not be other explanations? Could not the Duke have had his comfortable hideout at the Baker Street premises and, perhaps, have been living there, as Mr. Druce, with Mrs. Druce? Could not the husband, estranged, have been living elsewhere, but have been buried by the Duke and Mrs. Druce in the vault when he died?

The depositions of Annie Druce have the curious, unrehearsed ring of truth. What *were* the Welbeck passages for? Why and to where did the Duke vanish?

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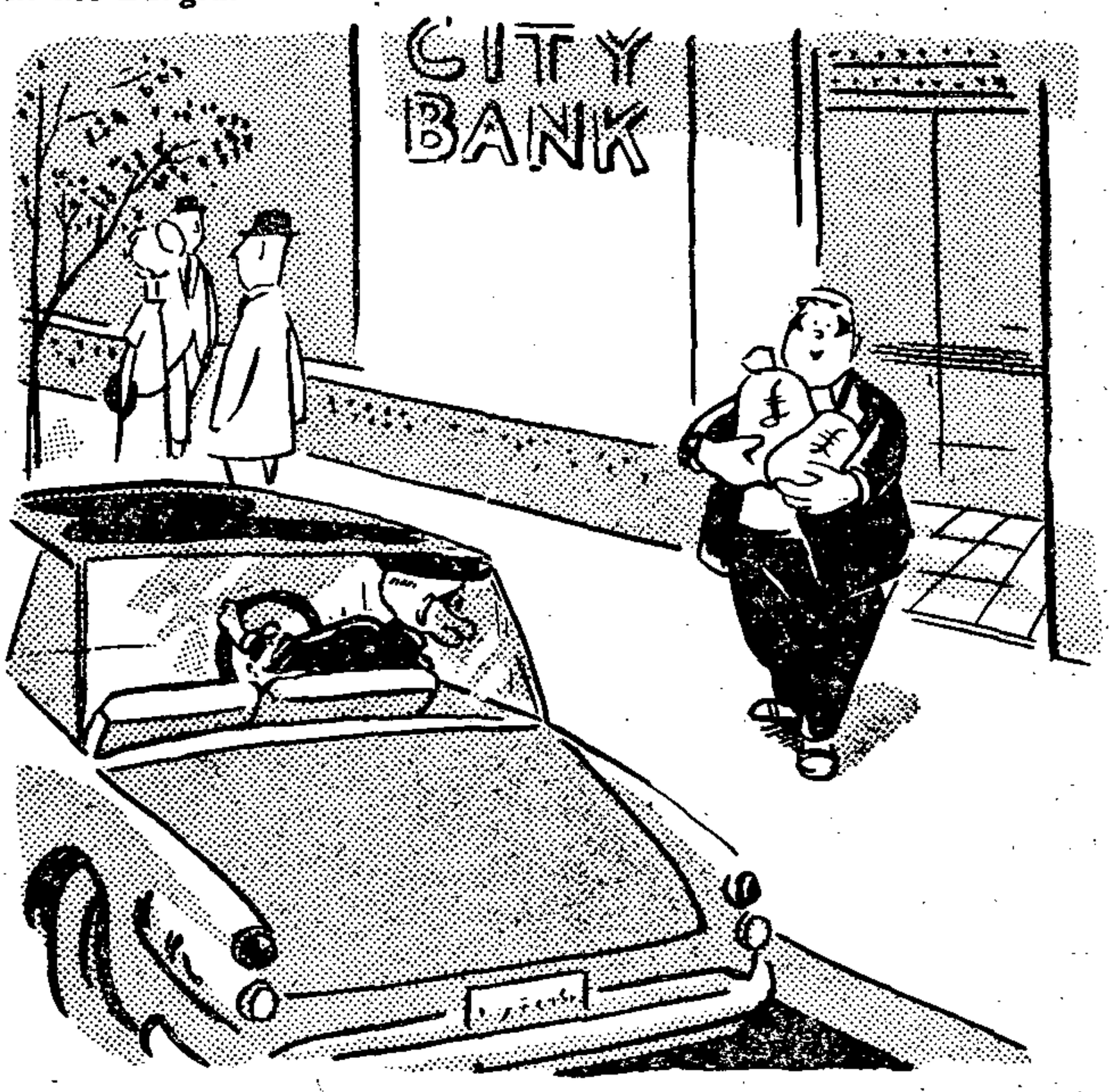
From "The Great Impostors," published by John Long

Butch the Burglar



"There's no hurry. They talked me into borrowing the money."

Nightmare Carousel

By RAY BRADBURY

SUPPERTIME.

All the people went home.

The carnival midway was silent.

The ticket booths were deserted now and the tent flaps closed.

The sun was going down fast and early because, after all, it was October.

Will Halloway bent to pick up a dime from the sawdust, and when he stood up Jim was gone.

"Jim?"

He looked one way, looked another, nothing but empty midway, and steam rising away off.

"Jim?" he called.

Then, "Ditched," he said to himself, kicking the sawdust. "Ditched me, that's what he did. Never did that before, never, never! Jim!"

Then he shut up, because he figured he knew where Jim had gone.

He headed back down the midway.

The merry-go-round was still there, still silent, with the big sign on it: OUT OF ORDER. KEEP OFF.

"Jim? Jim Nightshade! Oh, Jim . . ."

He whispered, moving in a big circle round the merry-go-round.

"Jim, I know you're here!"

He picked up the bunting flounce on an unused sales-pitch booth nearby.

Jim was crouched, hiding underneath, looking out now, disgusted.

"O.K.," he said. "Drop the curtain and let me be."

"Not on your tin whistle, come out of there! You . . ."

They both heard the voices at the same time. Instead of

"I write," says Ray Bradbury, "because I love writing. I'm not a thinker; if an idea comes I'm delighted and just leave it to grow. My logic is all in my emotions." If emotions produce such novels as Something Wicked This Way Comes there's much to be said for them as substitutes for thought. Every month Bradbury elects to write three stories, one science fiction, one fantastic, and one straight. His latest novel, Something Wicked This Way Comes, is a fascinating combination of all three, and Argosy is proud to present this extract before book publication.

No writer is so steeped in the sheer magic of fantasy and the enchanted realms of may-be as Ray Bradbury; even science fiction comes as poetry in his hands—and he's been writing this since he was twelve years old. His stories sell as far apart as Sweden and South Africa; London's Royal Court Theatre are interested in his plays, and in Paris Jean-Louis Barrault is staging The Martian Chronicles. His wizardry is very nearly complete.

"When some men turn on a tap, they expect water to come out," he once commented. "I hope that wine will come out." And for Ray Bradbury one day it probably will.

pulling Jim out, Will fell to his hands and knees, scuttled in, and dropped the bunting curtain. "What the—?" cried Jim.

"Sh! Someone's coming."

"I hear them coming, let's get out of here!"

"Sh, for cri-yi!" Will slapped his hand hard over Jim's mouth and held tight.

"All clear?" said a voice.

"All clear," said another.

Jim struggled. Will knocked his head hard against Jim's and clamped his mouth tighter.

"All right, Mr. Dark, start the merry-go-round."

"It's done, Mr. Cooger, it's done."

That made Jim stop struggling. They both lay very still. With a popping explosion, the merry-go-round groaned to life. Will saw Jim's eyes, Jim saw Will's, there in the dark under the stand, both thinking: But the merry-go-round's out of order!

Will put an eye to a moth-hole in the bunting, as did Jim. They both gasped.

The merry-go-round was starting, yes, but . . .

It was going *backwards!*

Will hit his arm, hard.

Backwards, Will finished, to himself.

Now the little calliope inside the merry-go-round rattle-

snapped its nervous-stallion shivering drums, clashed its harvest-moon cymbals, toothed its castanets, and throatily choked and sobbed its reeds, whistles, and baroque flues.

The music, Will thought, it's backwards, *too!*

Peering through the hole, he saw Mr. Dark turn, startled, as if he had heard Jim. For a moment the man seemed to be staring through the hole at Will. His heart banged.

The calliope screamed. The merry-go-round wheeled faster, shrieking, plunging, going round-about back. Mr. Dark took a step towards the booth where Jim and Will lay hidden. Will's insides turned to onion soup. He felt Jim stiffen, too, whether he wanted to or not. Then the calliope gave a particularly violent shriek, which made dogs howl way over in the next county; Mr. Dark hesitated, and turned back.

A grown man was riding one of the stationary chairs in the carousel.

"That must be . . ." hissed Jim.

Mr. Cooger, Will thought. The other owner, proprietor, and keeper of Cooger and Dark's Combined Extravaganzas.

Mr. Cooger was a man of forty-five, with a very red face and bristly reddish hair and looked so funny sitting there in the merry-go-round alone, saying nothing, looking nowhere, going backwards, around, around, with the music squealing backwards, too. Will tried to figure what the music was. He memorised the tune. He hummed it forwards, but it was no use, he couldn't catch and hold it. And there went the merry-go-round, back in a circle, while Mr. Dark watched from the sidelines.

It was Jim who first saw what else was happening; he kicked Will, and pointed. Will thrust his face closer to the moth-hole. Mr. Cooger's face was melting like wax.

His hands were becoming doll's hands.

His body fell away beneath his clothes and, a moment later, his clothes shrank to fit the smaller body.

His face flickered in the shadows. He—*dwindled.*

Will saw Jim's head shift, circling, as Mr. Cooger drifted round, the horses leapt after, the music inhaled backwards, while Mr. Cooger got younger. And younger. And *younger.*

Each time he came to view he sat alone to himself, feeling his bones melt away into tender years. He gazed off peacefully at the twilight hills as his nose diminished and his ears reshaped themselves like small pink roses. And his breath fine and sweet . . .

Mr. Cooger was nineteen.

Around went the reverse parade of horse, pole, music, man become young man, young man becoming boy.

Mr. Cooger was seventeen.

Another time and another time around under the quivering tree shadows with Will whispering, Jim counting the times around, around, and the shadows erased the years, yes, the violet late-day, early-evening shadows shook time's dust from the traveller, rubbed out the spider lines while the music gasped, choked, ceased, hissed only faintly now like sand sucked back up the hourglass. The carousel swam round one last, easy, lazy time, and rocking on a vast and invisible tide, stopped.

The figure seated in the carved, white wooden chair was very small now.

Mr. Cooger was twelve years old.

"No," gasped Jim. "No."

The small figure stepped down from the merry-go-round platform, its face in shadow, but its hands, newborn wrinkled pink, held out in the last rays of the sun.

The strange man-boy shot his gaze here, there, up, down, smelling panic somewhere, fear nearby, terror and awe in the vicinity. The eyes fixed to the hole in the bunting. Will jerked his face away. The man-boy's eyes flicked on. Then the small figure broke into a run and lit off down the empty midway through the swiftly gathering shadows.

Jim was first to dare to pull up a corner of the bunting to peer out.

Mr. Dark was gone, too, off somewhere in the dinnertime hush.

"Jim! Where are you going?"

"I don't know, but we *got* to follow, don't we? My gosh, Mr. Cooger got on a man and got off a boy, right?"

Jim started to walk, to jog.

"Jim, let's go home."

"Oh, gosh, Will, how I wish we could. But it's too late; we saw, we saw. And now, no matter what, we got to see more."

"Yeah," said Will miserably. "Lord, I guess we do."

And they ran at last, in the quiet supper hour, following they didn't know what to they didn't know where.

It was good they had to run at a time like this. Will didn't know what he would have done if he had just stood around and thought about what he had seen. Putting one foot in front of the other gave the whole thing time to sink in.

Out on the highway the last of the sun was gone, and whatever they were chasing was so far ahead as to be only a fleeting shadow.

"Twenty times!" yelled Jim. "The merry-go-round, twenty times I counted it going round."

"I counted twenty-one. Boy, boy."

"You can say that again! Boy, *oh*, boy!"

They slowed. Far ahead, the shadow seemed to stop and look

back. Jim and Will ducked in by a tree, and let it move on again.

It, thought Will. Why do I think *It*? It's a boy. No, a man. Well, what is it, then? Something that's changed is what it is. Something that must be followed, in the long run. And here we go.

"Willy," Jim broke in. "I figured it. There must've been *two* people on that merry-go-round, Mr. Cooger and this boy, see, and . . ."

"No, it was one man, he never moved! Hey, he's turned into Culpepper Street. Quick!"

They rounded the corner.

"We'll lose him!"

"He's lost!"

The street lay long and empty in the lamplight. Leaves blew on the dark porches. And that was all. No boy. No shadow.

"To heck with it," said Will. "Let's—"

He stopped, looking up at Miss Foley's window. In that window someone stood looking out.

A boy, no more and no less than twelve years old.

"Jim," said Will. "Don't look. Keep walking. Round the corner again."

"What's eating you?"

Will dragged him the rest of the way and held him, tight, so he couldn't lean round and stare.

"Jim, that boy in Miss Foley's window."

"Her nephew, you mean?"

"Nephew, heck! Maybe her nephew's face, but the eyes, Jim, the eyes!"

"What about 'em?"

"That's one part of people don't change, young, old, six or sixty. The eyes, Jim, the eyes were the eyes of Mr. Cooger."

"No!"

"Yes!"

They both stood enjoying the sound of each other's heart.

"Are you sure that's the boy?" asked Jim. "Did you see his face when he jumped off the merry-go-round?"

"No, it was too dark, but that don't matter; the face, Jim, it's the eyes, and that boy in the window has got Mr. Cooger's, and where did he get them, tell me, *where?*"

"Gosh," said Jim, sidling up the corner and peering carefully round. "Let's go back, slow and easy."

"You crazy? He looked right at me. It was like opening the door on a furnace."

"We got to tell Miss Foley what's hiding in her house, don't we?"

Will swallowed uneasily. He didn't like the way Jim talked or looked now. His voice was numbed and his eyes were shining funny.

"Well, *don't* we?"

"Jim, you don't give a darn about Miss Foley. 'Fess up!"

Jim said nothing. He just blinked once, and the lids came down over his shiny eyes and went up, and Will had the feeling about Jim again that he had always had about a dog he had once owned. Some time every year, that dog, after being good for months, just ran out into the world and didn't come back for days, and

when he did come back was scrawny and limp and burred and smelling of all kinds of weeds and as if he had rolled in the dirty mangers of the world just so he could come home with a funny little smile pinned to his muzzle. Dad had named the dog Plato, because, Dad said, he was the wilderness philosopher—there was nothing, you could see by his eyes each time he came back, he didn't know. Then the dog would live in innocence again, the wildness die in his eyes, and he'd walk in grace for months, then vanish, and the whole thing would start again. Now, looking at Jim, he thought he heard him whimper under his breath. He could hear the bristles going up all over Jim. He felt Jim's ears flatten, he saw Jim sniff the newly darkened night. Jim's lips glowed with fever, which got licked away by a quick, strange, and never-before-seen tongue. Jim smelled smells that no one knew, heard ticks from clocks that told another time. And it had to do somehow with that house, the carnival boy-man-Cooger in that house, and . . .

"Jim!" cried Will. "Don't move!"

"Who's moving?"

And it was true, he hadn't budged an inch. But he was a million miles off, and his private radio gone dead.

"Going to walk right up, ring the bell," he murmured, "and say we came to meet that nephew she was talking about at the meadow today."

"We can't do that. Meet him face to face?"

"Better than sneaking by her front doorstep acting creepy. My aunt's eyebrows, Will, you scared?" Jim held him firmly and started the march round the corner. "All we do is shake his paw, stare him in his pink eye or some such, and if it *is him* or Whatever, we tell Miss Foley in private, call her on the phone maybe; we'll decide later. Now here's the door. Up we go."

"Wait!"

The window was empty.

Will sighed and felt himself hoisted, not wanting but wanting to know if the boy in that house had Mr. Cooger inside his head, well hidden, but showing like a firefly between the eyelashes.

Jim rang the bell.

"We're nutty," said Will. "What if It answers the door? I'm scared dry! If I went to the bathroom, I'd sprinkle dust. Jim, why aren't *you* scared; you're not, *are* you?"

Jim drifted his hand out, in his own dream again, to press the bell. "I'll be darned," he said to the door. "No, I'm not. I don't know why. Hey—someone's coming." The door opened.

Miss Foley beamed out at them. "Jim! Will! How was the carnival? Come in. Well, can't you move, Will?"

Dust, thought Will, is what I'd sprinkle.

" Miss Foley," he said, " maybe it'd be better if *you* stepped outside."

She held the door wide. Suddenly it was all so wrong. Once in, what would you say? Or with her outside, even, what then? Miss Foley, that boy you call Robert is—Miss Foley, we think you ought to know . . .

Will stared.

Beyond Miss Foley, a beaded curtain hung like a dark blue thundershower across the parlour entry.

Beneath that coloured rain, a pair of dusty, small shoes stood quietly. Beyond the rain somewhere, the evil boy. Why evil? Because. Because. Just evil is all.

" Robert," Miss Foley called into the dark blue, always-falling beads of rain. " Come meet two of my students."

The rain poured aside. A fresh, candy-pink hand broke through, all by itself, as if testing the weather in the hall.

Good grief, Will thought, he'll look me in the eyes. He'll see the merry-go-round and himself going round and round, it's printed on my eyeballs like I been struck by lightning.

" Miss Foley! "

Now the pink face stuck out through the dark downpour.

" A terrible thing. We got to tell you! "

Now the body followed. The bead rain shushed into place behind the small boy.

Will stammered, flushed, then spat it out.

" Mr. Crosetti is dead! "

What? Jim almost said, and stopped.

Mr. Cooger's eyes snapped back and forth in the boy's pink, shining, candy face. Will grabbed Jim's arm.

" The barber? " asked Miss Foley.

" See this haircut." Will turned, trembling, pointing to the back of his head. " Mr. Crosetti cut it. Jim, too. Show 'em, Jim. We're on our way down to the barber shop to make sure, right, Jim? "

" What a shame." Miss Foley reached out to bring the strange boy forward. " Boys, this is Robert, my nephew from Wisconsin."

Robert-the-Nephew nodded.

Will stuck out his hand. Robert-the-Nephew looked at it curiously, and would not touch it. " What are you looking at? " he said calmly to Jim.

" You," said Jim, surprised. " You look familiar."

Jim! Will yelled to himself.

" Oh? " said Robert.

" Yeah," said Jim, calm as ice. " Like an uncle of mine."

Robert did not look at Jim, but kept his eyes fastened to Will. Will held his eyes to the floor. He didn't want Robert to see his eyeballs turning with the whirl of the merry-go-round. He had a crazy wish to hum the backward music. He gritted his teeth.

At last he forced himself to raise his eyes, look straight at the nephew. Now!

It was strange and crazy and the floor sank away beneath, for there was the pink, shiny, Hallowe'en mask of a small, pretty boy's face, with holes cut in it, and behind the holes, the eyes of Mr. Cooger shone out, old, old, eyes as bright as stars, and the light from them taking a million years to get here. And through the little nostrils cut in the wax mask, Mr. Cooger's breath went in steam, came out ice. And the pink tongue moved small behind those well-ordered, white, corn-kernel teeth.

Will looked up. Mr. Cooger, somewhere behind the eye slits, went blink-click with his insect-Kodak pupils. The lenses exploded like suns, then turned chilly and serene again.

He glanced at Jim. Blink-click. He had Jim focused, shot, developed, and filed away in darkness. Blink-click.

Jim gazed back, no storm ruffling his feathers, taking pictures of Robert in his own quiet way.

"Sad news or bad news," said Miss Foley confusedly, "food helps to forget. Come in, boys, for dessert."

"Thanks," said Jim.

"But we've got to go!" cried Will.

Jim turned and looked amazed at Will's not wanting to stick here for ever. "You go on, Will, I'll stay and—"

"Jim, we promised your mother we'd tell her about Mr. Crosetti so she could send flowers."

Mr. Cooger inside the nephew went silently blink-click, blink-click, listening through the toy ears, first to one, then the other, watching through the toy-charm eyes, whetting the doll's mouth with a Pekingese tongue.

"Oh," said Jim. "Sure."

"Well, come back tomorrow," said Miss Foley. "Go to the carnival with Robert."

"Yes," said Robert. "Go to the carnival with me."

"I don't know if we can," said Will.

"That'd be great!" Jim, smiling, shot out his hand.

Robert took it, shook it, and gave it back.

"Good night," said Will.

And they were out of the door and the door was swinging shut on Miss Foley and beyond her the face with the eyes in it going blink-click still making and recording images of two incoherent boys, and they were fumbling down the steps while the merry-go-

round started up again in Will's head, rushing while the leaves in the trees hissed with wind. By the time he reached the bottom of the steps, Will's face was pale.

"Don't look round," he whispered. "He may be watching. Jim, what's wrong with you? Shaking hands. Promising to come back tomorrow to go to the carnival with him. Don't you see it's Mr. Cooger?"

"It's him, all right. All small. Boy, those eyes. Boy." Jim whistled his appreciation of the whole miracle.

"Jim, coming down the steps, I hummed it and hummed it, and turned it round, that music from the calliope that played when Mr. Cooger got younger and younger. Now I know why we can't have anything to do with him. We've got to get home, telephone Miss Foley from there. The music . . ."

"Well—?"

"It was the *Funeral March.* Played backwards!"

"Which *Funeral March*?"

"Dumb, there's only one, by a guy named Chopin, and Chopin only wrote one tune! The *Funeral March.*"

"But why a funeral march played backwards?"

"Mr. Cooger was marching *away* from the grave, not *towards* it, wasn't he? Heck and hell, Jim, heck and hell!"

"Willy-William, you're absolutely brilliant."

"Darn rights! Oh gosh, Jim, watch it. Don't look. He's there! At the window! Well . . . wave at him. That's it. So long! Now, come on. Walk. And whistle something. *Not* Chopin, for gosh sakes! Now . . ."

Jim waved. Will waved. Both whistled *Oh Susannah.*

A shadow lifted its hand in the tall window.

The boys hurried off down the street.

In the alley behind the Halloway and Nightshade houses was a big, old-fashioned, pine-plank boardwalk. It had been there ever since Will remembered. Probably it had been carried round and left there when civilisation unthinkingly began to put in the dull, hard, unresisting cement sidewalks. Perhaps his grandfather, a man of strong sentiment and wild impulse, who could let nothing go without a roar and a shout, had flexed his muscles in favour of this vanishing landmark, and, with a dozen or so handy men, had toted a good forty feet or more of the boardwalk round into the alley where it had lain like the skeleton of some indefinable monster through the years, baking in the sun, rotting lushly in the rains.

Lying on his bed after an hour, two hours, Will realised he was thinking of Grandfather's huge gift from another time.

He was waiting to hear the boardwalk speak. In what language, and what about? Well . . .

Boys have never been known to go right up to any house whatsoever to ring the bell or knock on the door and ask for Luke, Sam, or Bill. They'd rather climb trees and chunk dirt on clapboards or chestnuts down shingles, leave mysterious notes flapping on downed kites, on cupola windowsills, anything rather than be caught dead, cap in hand, actually on a front porch, asking after a fellow demon.

That was why Will and Jim so dearly loved the way *they* had of giving summons to each other. Late nights, if there were any graveyards to be leapfrogged through, or cats to be thrown at sour people's open windows (not live cats, no, real dead ones, the deader the better!) one or the other of the boys would leave his house alone, and go out under the moon and do a xylophone dance on that old, hollow, echoing musical boardwalk at midnight.

By now, after years, the boys had tuned the walk, prying up an *A* board and putting it here, lifting up an *F* board and nailing it loosely back down there until the walk was near to being as melodious as weather and two enterprising scouts could fashion it. By the tune stomped out, treaded out, you could tell what was up. If Will heard Jim tromping down hard on seven or eight notes of *Swanee River*, he scrambled out of the house knowing it was trail night on the creek leading down to the river and all sorts of cave adventures there. Or if Jim heard Will out there leaping about like a scalded cur-dog on the timbers and the tune was close to being *Marching Through Georgia*, that meant that the plums or the peaches or the apples were ripe enough for them to try to get sick on that night out at Walter George's orchard farm.

So this night Will held his breath waiting for a tune to call him forth. What kind of tune would Jim play to represent the carnival, Miss Foley, Mr. Cooger, the evil boy? Will thought of a dozen, threw them all away.

And then, at last, about ten o'clock, he heard, or thought he heard, Jim out in the moonlight leaping way up and coming right down like a tomcat in spring on the vast xylophone. And the tune, if tune it was, was like the funeral dirge they had talked forwards and backwards a few hours before.

Will turned his head towards the open window, holding his breath. Yes . . . it was there, wasn't it? The hollow notes reverberated, didn't they, fading fast as new notes were struck?

But just then he saw Jim's window blind flip up. The window itself slid quietly up. Jim, without a word, scuttled down the side of the house using the drainpipe and the secret hand- and foot-grips he had nailed and hidden in the ivy.

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Will, shocked, said nothing.

Jim!

Jim, on the ground, stiffened as if he'd heard his name.

You're not going without me, Jim ?

Jim glanced swiftly up. Will jumped back.

We're still the same, Will thought. I heard Jim playing the boardwalk, calling, but he wasn't. I come to the window, he's there. Now I don't call, but Jim hears. He's down there now, looking up. We're still pals, smell things nobody else smells, hear things no one else hears. We got the same blood, we run the same way.

Will looked out and down. The driveway was empty.

A salamander over the lawn, across the hedge, there went Jim.

For one swift, bright moment, Will thought of his mother below, and then the last, hard thought: Jim running to one and only one place, alone, not wanting anyone with him.

Will was out of the window, down the trellis, over the hedge, before he stopped to look at himself. I'm *alone*, he thought. I've never been out *alone* at night before. And where am I going?

Where Jim goes.

To Miss Foley's.

And sure enough, there went Jim, and here came Will, and Will thinking, Jim, why run and not tell me?

But only Jim knew, and he was silent as his feet in the grass. He skimmed like an owl after a mouse. He sailed like a small boat over the October lawns, and when he stopped . . .

There was Miss Foley's.

Jim glanced back.

Will became bush behind a bush, a shadow under a tree, with two pieces of moon, his eyes, rounding the image of Jim under the windows, near the porch.

Jim whispered something.

No, thought Will.

Jim raised his voice. " Hey, there," he called softly. " Hey."

Good grief, thought Will, he wants to be slit up the middle and stuffed with glass.

" Hey! " called Jim. " Oh, hey there, you."

A shadow flickered in the uppermost window of the house.

Jim, gazing up, in awe, had a funny look, of breathless anticipation. Will ground his teeth.

Jim looked up, with love, with devotion, like a cat waiting for some special dark mouse to run out. His eyes shone green. He seemed to be getting taller and taller, as if the moon were pulling him like taffy, as if his bones were moving up in a tide, as if he wanted to be very tall, very tall indeed.

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Now the shadow in the window above vanished. Will could feel it sifting down through the house like a cold breath.

"Jim!"

Jim spun, gasped, fell back.

Will seized him by the arms, the shirt, the waist. Jim knocked his hands away.

"Will, go home!"

"Jim, you can't stay here. Don't talk to *him!*"

"Get away, go on!"

"Oh, my gosh, Jim, before it's too late, he'll chew you up and spit out the bones."

"Shut up!"

"What do you want, Jim? Tell me. What? What good is this?"

"Will, if you're my friend—"

"I am! Get down, for cri-yi. Think of your mother. What do you want from him, he's no good, he scares me, why aren' *you* scared?"

He heard Jim's heart rabbiting in his chest.

"Because," hissed Jim. "Will, let go. If you don't, I'll remember when I'm older!"

"When you're what?"

"Older, damn it, older!" Jim spat in Will's face.

As if his hands had been struck by lightning, Will pulled away.

Jim stood there, swaying.

Will looked at his hands and put one up to wipe the spittle off his cheek. "Oh, Jim," he mourned. "Oh, Jim, Jim..."

Will heard the merry-go-round moving forward, forward, forward in the night, going round and round. He had a glimpse of Jim on a black stallion, riding off and about, circling in tree-shadow, coming back sixteen, coming back seventeen, coming back nineteen, twenty, and leaping off and standing tall in the moon, looking at Will, not Jim any more, not Jim at all, and Will still young, still thirteen, almost fourteen, on the empty midway, very small, very young, very afraid.

Will hauled off and hit Jim, once, very hard, on the nose.

Jim yelled.

Will hit him in the stomach, then climbed all over him and toppled him down in some bushes by the sidewalk.

Falling, he grabbed Jim's mouth and crammed it full of fingers.

Jim gnashed his teeth, but Will wouldn't let go, he let the biting happen, he felt his flesh mashed and the blood running, but he held tight and squeezed.

The two lay mashed, squeezed, pressed in violent quiet, Will's legs pinioning Jim's.

The door opened wide to let the small shadow out. Something stood on the porch to look out over the town. Something searched for Jim and didn't find him.

Will felt Jim's head pushing to look up. Will opened his eyes and saw Jim's eyes glaring at him and then rolling wild. Jim struggled. Will held on and looked at the porch himself.

The something on the porch could have been a man, could have been a boy. Will smelled the man somehow and saw the boy a moment later come out in the street light. There was his face, round and smooth as a peach. But there were the man's eyes again, looking out through the slits of a Sleeping Beauty mask at Hallowe'en. At any moment Will expected a crack to show in the top of the boy's head and move down, cracking his face in half, splitting his nose, his chin, like an axe chopped down through the neck, the chest, to let a great wet snake-bird, a thing with scales that smelled of old, bubbling sulphur pits and slime, heave out and thrash its wings on the porch, a creature big enough to pluck them both off, fly them over the hills away towards a dawn that would never come. There was a thing inside the thing that said it was a boy that pretended it was good, that never shaved, but was all tarantula hair inside.

He stood on the porch, the nephew boy, the hidden Cooger,

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his eyes glittering, his mouth open like a third eye. The head stopped moving.

Robert-the-Nephew was looking right at Will where he lay under the bushes, clenched to Jim, fighting the outcry, the explosion, Jim's need.

The evil boy smiled. It was a smile of welcome that enjoyed the challenge of this scene, Jim and Will locked in mortal combat on the lawn.

Jim grunted and kicked.

If I let go, thought Will, Jim'd jump up and wave. And then! The nephew would smile, that lizard mouth open, a sticky tongue would shoot out, wrap round Jim and drag him down that stinking throat.

The smile of the strange boy on the porch flicked off like a light, as if he had heard every thought of Will's. He vanished into the house.

Jim kicked and moaned, but Will waited, knowing the boy would be back, knowing he had forced the boy into some new action, he couldn't know what.

Something flew through the air.

It was the strange boy, leaping over the porch rail, striking the sidewalk like a basketball, his hands were full of stars. The boy whirled once, swivelled, stumbled on some dustbins at the kerb. They fell with a thunderous roar.

He did that on purpose, thought Will.

A house light came on.

The strange boy's hands flashed out. Glittering objects sprayed over the pavement, into the grass, along the street bricks.

Then shutting up his fresh new smile like putting an explosion away in a box, the boy shot away with incredible speed through the town.

Jim, with a final burst of strength, broke free, leapt up.

"Wait! We won't hurt you!"

Will seized Jim's foot, lost it as Jim kicked away.

A window slashed up. Miss Foley leaned out as Jim bent to pick up a woman's wristwatch. He held and turned over a diamond bracelet, looked at the running, dwindling figure of the boy, then up at the window where Miss Foley cried, "Who's there? Will? Jim! What's that you're holding?"

But Jim ran off, the bright stuff in his hands.

"You dropped something!" he shouted. "Here! Here!"

Will paused only long enough to see the window was empty again. Miss Foley had gone to check something. When he heard her scream, he knew she had discovered the burglary.

Will ran. And running, he knew he was doing just what the evil boy wanted. With all his heart, he knew he should turn, go pick up the bracelets, the jewels, give them to Miss Foley, tell her what happened. But there ran the boy, there ran Jim.

And running himself, he heard Miss Foley's cries turn on more lights and make him a criminal, Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade, night-runners, thieves; from now on, that's what they'd seem.

Jim, he thought, stop! It's not too late. If we run, the cops will run after, and nobody'll believe anything we say about anything, the carnival, the merry-go-round, anything, tomorrow tonight.

But Jim ran on.

And Will ran after.

And the evil boy, laughing, led the way.

Three animals they were, scuttering, loping, scampering in the moonlight, an otter, a tomcat, and a rabbit.

Me, thought Will, I'm the rabbit. And he was white, and much afraid.

The otter ran with his smile lighting the way.

The tomcat ran with his fever bleaching the shadows.

The rabbit ran with the shotgun blasts in his feet, his head, his heart.

Jim, he thought, let me catch you! If I don't it's good-bye Jim, good-bye me, good-bye whole fool town.

They reached the city limits, and grass smell took them, moon brightness breathed in an ocean around the three spaced figures. Tomcat was closing in on otter, but rabbit was closer still to rangy cat, and getting his second wind. Will felt now that he might even pull up, idle his motor, converse with Jim as they dogged along, circle him as he ran towards the Deadfall, the viper pit, one or the other.

They hit the carnival grounds at a good thirty miles an hour, give or take a mile, and no one slowing down.

By this time, Will sensed, the otter was running scared, too, for he kept looking back, then putting on bursts of speed.

He didn't think I'd follow, thought Will. He thought I'd call the police, make a fool of myself, or run home, just hide. But I won a couple of track ribbons and Jim was on my back.

Jim and the evil boy vanished round a tent. By the time Will reached the midway, the merry-go-round was sputtering, coughing. The music dinned, pounded, squealed, piped as the evil boy rode the machine round in a whirl of midnight dust.

Jim was just standing there, ten feet from the merry-go-round,

watching it fly, his eyes ablaze. The merry-go-round was going *forward!*

"Jim!" Will screamed. "No!"

The evil boy swept out of sight on the other side of the whirling machine. When he hove round again, he put his hand out calling softly, ". . . Jim . . ."

"No!" shrieked Will, and plunged forward.

Jim was *on* the carousel! His left foot flicked and hit the platform. His right foot was in the air. It was the only thing to grab. Will grabbed it.

"Jim!"

They fell in a heap.

The evil boy, surprised, whisked on round in darkness, one year older. One year taller, bigger, meaner.

"Oh, God, Jim, quick!" Will leapt up to the control box on the wooden post outside the carousel. He hit the switch. But Jim was there, striking him on the back, the arms, the face, babbling.

"Willy, Willy, don't, you'll spoil it, no!"

Jim knocked the switch full back.

Will spun, grabbed him, and whacked his face. They fell against the control box. Will saw the evil boy, a year older still,

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IN ARGOSY NEXT MONTH

glide round into night. Five or six more times round and he'd be bigger than the two of them!

"Jim, he'll kill us!"

"Not me! No!"

They thrashed against the switch.

Will felt a surge of electricity. He yelled, pulled back, hit the switch handle. The control box blew half apart, sputtering; blue fire spurted. Jim and Will, knocked flying by the blast, lay watching as the merry-go-round went wild. The evil boy cursed. He spat, he brayed as he spun in the great centrifuge. His face came, went, came, went. He clawed the air. He stomped drunkenly, fighting to leap off. He ran, swayed, groped for brass poles, slipped, fell.

His head struck the iron heel of the panicking black stallion.

Jim hissed and really shrieked then, rolling over and over, Will riding him hard, holding on, giving yell for yell, both frightpale, eyes wide, heart ramming heart. Electric bolts from the switch box fused out in a blue fount, a blast of fireworks. The carousel spun thirty, forty, fifty times and the calliope whistled and boiled steam and lightning, jumped again and again over and round the sweating boys, and the evil boy lying on the carousel platform became not a boy any more but a man and then more than a man and then more than a man, round, round, very silently.

"He's, he's, oh, he's, oh, look, look, he's . . ." gasped Jim, and began to cry, because it was the only thing to do. "Oh, Will, get up, we got to make it go back, oh, we gotta make it go back, oh, Willy, God, God!"

Lights flashed on in the tents. But no one came out.

Maybe, thought Will, all the explosions, the electric storms, make the freaks think the whole world's jumping through the midway.

Will lay thinking he heard the boy-man's heart thumping fast slow fast slow, very fast, very slow, incredibly fast, then as slow as the moon going down the sky on a night in winter.

Someone on the merry-go-round wailed.

Someone spoke.

Thank God it's dark, thought Will. Thank God, I can't see. There goes someone. There goes something. There it goes again. There, there, there . . .

A great shadow on the moving machine tried to stagger up, but it was late, late, later still, very late, latest of all, oh, very late. The shadow, crumbling, seemed to dissolve. The carousel was like the earth spinning, whipping away the air, whipping away the sunlight, leaving only dark and cold and age.

Then, in a final eruption of blue stars, the switch box blew itself completely apart. All the lights in the carnival blinked out.

The carousel slowed itself through the cold night wind.

Will let Jim go. Jim let go of Will.

They both gasped in trembling breaths of cold air.

How many times, thought Will, did it go round? Sixty . . . eighty . . . ninety . . . .

How many times, said Jim's face, all snow, all moon-whiteness watching the dead carousel shiver and rock in the tidal winds, at last slowing to a halt.

The boys stared at the stopped world of the merry-go-round, which nothing, not their hearts, their hands, or their heads, could send back anywhere now.

They stood up. They walked slowly round the merry-go-round, their shoes whispering in the black grass.

The shadowy figure was lying on the far side of the carousel, on the plank floor. Its face was turned away.

But one hand hung over the edge of a platform.

It was not a boy's hand.

Nor was it the hand of a man.

It looked like a wax hand that had melted and shrivelled in an oven.

The man's hair was long and spidery and white. It blew like milkweed in the breathing dark.

They bent over the man and looked into his face.

The eyes were mummified, were shrivelled shut. The nose was melted down upon the gristly bone. The mouth was a ruined white flower, the petals twisted and fallen into a thin wax coating over the teeth through which a faint breath whistled, bubbled, whistled, bubbled. He was small inside his clothes, small as a child again, really, but tall, strung out, and old, so old, very old, not eighty, not ninety, not one hundred, no, not one hundred and ten, but one hundred and twenty or one hundred and thirty impossible years old.

Will put out his hand.

The man was cold as an albino frog. He smelled of the swamp and the moon and old Egyptian bandages. He was something seen and recollected from a long time ago, wrapped in yellow linens sealed under glass. But he was alive, puling like a babe, and shrivelling, dying fast, very fast, before their eyes.

Will turned and vomited over the side of the carousel.

Then, falling against each other, Jim and Will sledge-hammered the dust, the grass, with their numbed shoes, fleeing off down the midway . . .

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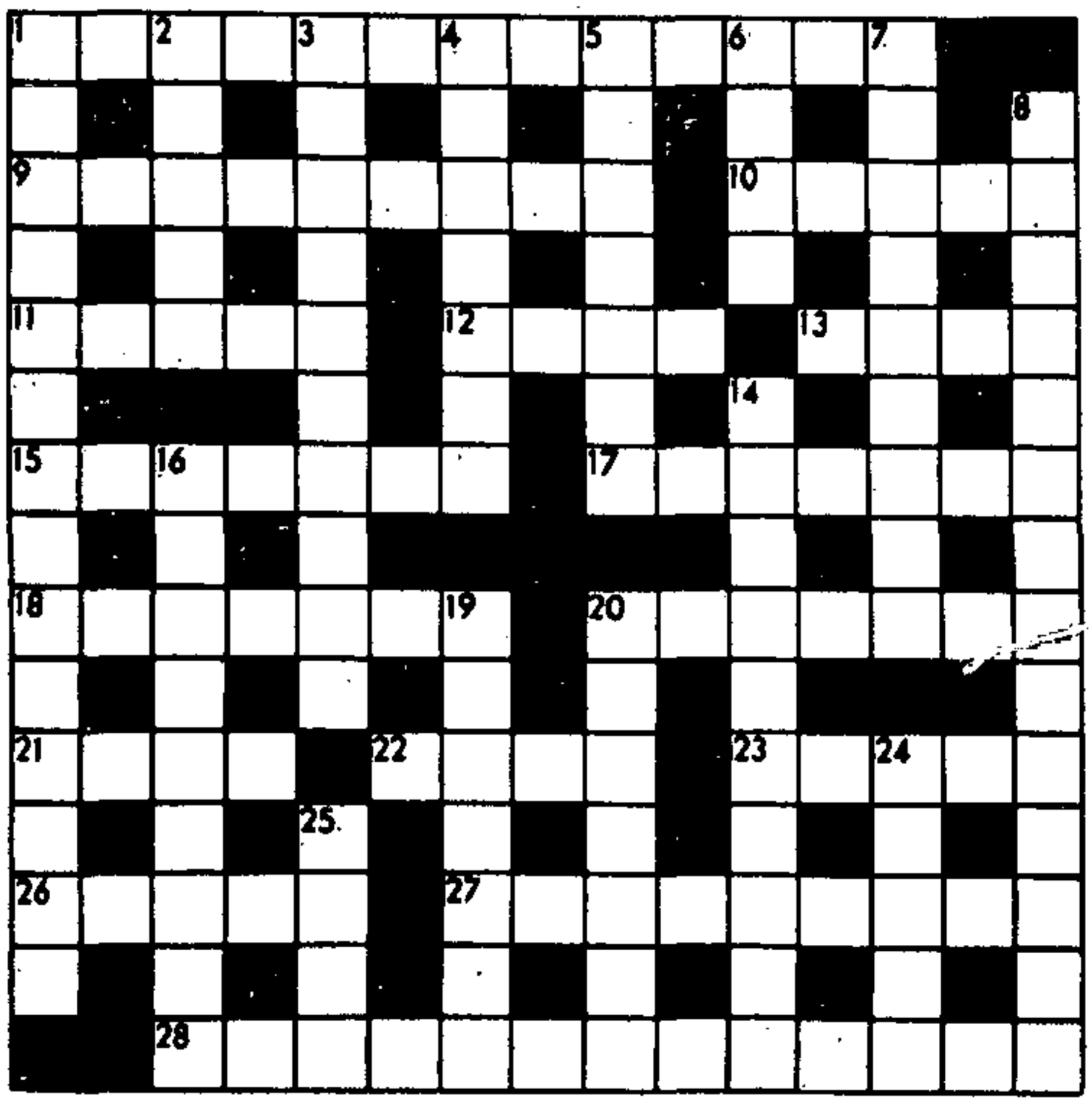
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 69



ACROSS

1 Ensa played in them! (8, 2, 3).

9 Sects leer at this choice young woman (9).

10 She arrives in Assisi by land (5).

11 Italian town at a so-changed level (5).

12 Roman law after me for this tree (4).

13 Precipitation in Paris now (4).

15 Sit back inside, Serg! There's a predator about (7).

17 No end of Cleary's tramps come twilight (7).

18 Simplicity of an A 1 veteran (7).

20 Good mixer (7).

21 Of Antrim, perhaps (4).

22 Pulse (4).

23 Put back around fifty and I see the flower (5).

26 Dominion leaf (5).

27 Criminal conjurer? (9).

28 Giant rugs stir, being frequently plucked (6, 7).

DOWN

1 Life in a restaurant? (3, 7, 4).

2 No odds at this price (5).

3 Four feet along the line you can see the tram teeter (10).

4 Idle? Yes! But they're blinking busy too (7).

5 Boy's tears when graduate quits (7).

6 Mixed stew in this direction (4).

7 Tell of England (5, 4).

8 Bursts of hot jazz perhaps! (7, 7).

14 Careless overtaker may be his client (10).

16 Pet stooge? (6-3).

19 Funereal type, according to O'Neill (7).

20 No. 9 bus turns and hares along similar lines (7).

24 One pound a tin, in a manner of speaking (5).

25 Half in front of John, perhaps (4).

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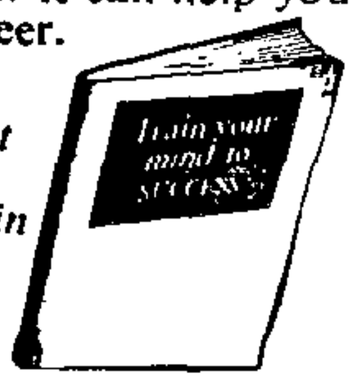

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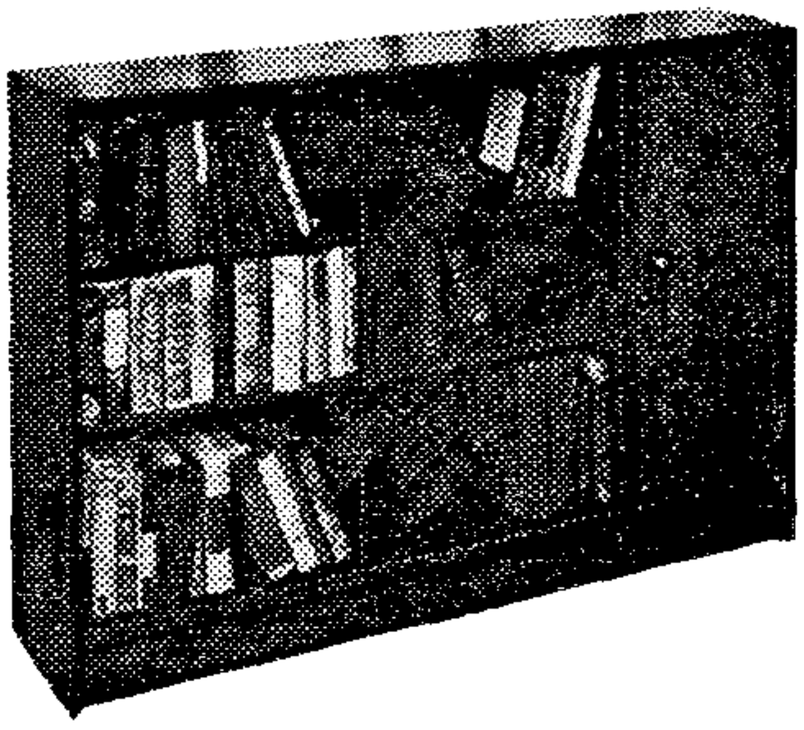

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